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ABSTRACT

Guidelines for central office staff and personnel involved in school-based management efforts are offered in this manual. Contents include an overview of school-based management and the functions of school site councils, suggestions for training designs, and nine training modules. Topics addressed in the module include: the roles and responsibilities of school councils; effective meetings and decision making; teamwork, effective schools; community relations; needs assessment; priority setting; problem analysis and strategy identification; and action planning, problem identification, and evaluation. Participant handouts, brief lectures, sample visuals, and instructional directions are provided. (LMI)

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SCHOOL BASED IMPROVEMENT

A MANUAL FOR PARENT-SCHOOL COUNCILS

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Barbara J. Hansen AND Carl L. Marburger

School Based Improvement

A Manual for Training School Councils

By

Barbara J. Hansen

and

Carl L. Marburger

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Suite 301, 10840 Little Patuxent Parkway, Columbia Maryland 21044

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Foreword

This is the third in a series of publications on school based improvement by the National Committee for Citizens in Education. This manual, *School Based Improvement: A Manual for Training School Councils* follows the publication of *School Based Improvement: A Manual for District Leaders* and *One School at a Time: School Based Management, a Process for Change*. Another manual, on training for parents, is planned.

Although we have expressed our gratitude to the Mott Foundation, we would like to say a special thank you to Pat Edwards of that foundation for her continued support and encouragement.

We also express our gratitude to Chrissie Bamber for her editing skills and sound advice and to Anne Henderson for her writing of the module on school based improvement and effective schools and her excellent critique of this manual.

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Why this manual?

When the National Committee for Citizens in Education first began training school site councils back in 1979, very few school and district administrators knew what school based management was. Only in isolated districts, such as Monroe County, Florida and Salt Lake City, had anyone successfully implemented school based management systems. Most teachers had never heard of the concept and neither had the majority of parents. Yet we found a number of administrators, teachers and parents who were willing to "give it a try" because they were convinced that students would be the beneficiaries when principals, teachers and parents, working together, made decisions for their schools.

These pioneers of what we have come to call "school based improvement" helped us invent training programs that, in turn, helped them to become more effective school-level decision makers. We have learned a lot over the years. Some of it through trial and error, but we now feel that we know how to provide council members with the skills and knowledge they need. And, we are convinced that school site improvement cannot be successful without this kind of training. Left on their own, the majority of councils flounder about trying to organize themselves and determine what they are to do. All too often they fall back on familiar methods of operating and no substantial change occurs.

Now school based management is no longer an isolated phenomenon. Districts all over the country are experimenting with forms of it. "Restructuring" is the latest word in school reform. As school districts delegate greater authority to local schools and school principals involve teachers and parents in helping to make decisions, the need for training increases. This manual, then, is NCCE's way to spread what we have learned about what works to schools and districts where we cannot be physically present.

We see this manual being used by central office staff and others who have been given the responsibility for ensuring the success of district-wide school based management efforts. In it are materials we have developed over the years. Specifically, it contains:

- an overview of school based improvement and the functions of school site councils;
- suggestions for training designs; and
- nine training modules, including participant handouts, brief lectures, sample visuals that can be used as overhead transparency masters or transferred to flip chart pages, and directions for using the materials.

Since these materials are based on NCCE's approach to school based management, the user is advised to read two other NCCE publications: *One School at a Time* and *School Based Improvement: A Manual for District Leaders*. The following review of what we mean by school based improvement may also be helpful.

What Is SBI?

Many larger school districts have created intermediate regional or district offices as a way to become more responsive to their various communities. New York City is the classic example. This is referred to as *administrative decentralization.* Administrative decentralization may be a necessary administrative move in systems with special racial or ethnic problems, in districts under court orders to provide special groupings or special services for certain schools, or where the district is too large to be manageable from a single central office. Unfortunately, it can also be a mechanism for blocking communications with individual schools and for dispersing bureaucratic accountability for those schools.

Political decentralization is a sharing of authority and power with local schools without a layer of intermediate units to block the flow of information or decisions. This form of decentralization is the cornerstone of school based improvement. It is difficult for many to understand that sharing power does not ultimately diminish power. That is as true for school people as it is for anyone else. But sharing authority and power is absolutely essential if school based improvement is to occur. School board members and central office administrators must be willing to specify, with great clarity, the decisions they are willing to delegate.

Another essential ingredient of SBI is shared decision making. Authority shared with the school must also be shared by the principal with staff, parents, community, and students. Principals do not give up authority or power easily either. They fear loss of control and retribution from the central office if they do not perform at some real or perceived standard of efficiency. Unless they are willing, however, to share their authority, the locus of power will simply transfer from the central office to the principal, and a new bureaucracy will form at the school level.

School based improvement requires both political decentralization and shared decision making, but it can take a number of different forms. That is because SBI is a process, not a project. Once launched, it evolves until it becomes the way the district and its schools manage and improve themselves. But, while the specifics may differ from school to school and district to district, all have three common elements:

- a management philosophy,
- an educational strategy, and
- an organizational structure.

Management Philosophy

School based improvement is founded on the following beliefs:

- People can be trusted. Those interested in and responsible for the education of children hold the welfare of those children in high regard.
- People are more likely to change when they have a voice in what those changes will be.
- Those who are closest to where implementation will occur are in the best position to decide how implementation should take place.

- Without bureaucratic interference, decisions are made more swiftly at the local level, and involving those affected brings more rapid and complete implementation of solutions.
- It is easier to change people's behavior than to alter their beliefs. If the structure of an organization is changed so that risk-taking and innovation are encouraged, people will behave accordingly.
- When people work together on common concerns, they lose the sense of being in separate camps.
- The resources for change and improvement are already in the school community. All we must do is release the energy that is now constrained.
- Parents are important contributors to the education of their children.
- Involving students in decision making gives them an opportunity to become responsible members of a democratic society.

These beliefs are buttressed by research that shows:[1]

- The more control a school has over those aspects of its organization that affect its performance—the articulation of its goals, the selection and management of its personnel, the specification of its policies—the more likely the school is to exhibit the qualities that have been found to promote effectiveness;
- Teachers who feel they are influential in decisions are more innovative and more likely to share their ideas with other teachers;
- Students who view their parents as supporting the school have higher self esteem and more positive attitudes toward school;
- Parent involvement in their children's schools is directly related to student achievement;
- Parent satisfaction with schools is positively related to parent participation and influence in decision making.

Recent calls for reforming the public schools are stressing the importance of allowing teachers to act like true professionals by giving them greater decision making authority in return for accountability for student progress. This is a dramatic change from earlier reports which called for higher standards and recruiting better teachers. This new focus on the working conditions of teachers stems, at least in part, from the attention being paid to employee participation by American business. Concerned about declining productivity, business leaders have turned to the employee participation programs of Japan and Western Europe as ways to more effectively use their employees' talents. Quality circles are one form of worker participation now widely used in American industry. They provide a mechanism for employees to be involved with decisions about their work. While the industrial model cannot be applied directly to schooling, the principle is the same. The persons closest to the activities are in the very best

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[1]Chubb, John E. *The Dilemma of Public School Impovement.* Unpublished paper prepared for presentation in the Spoor dialogues on Leadership Program, Dartmouth College, May 4, 1987.

Henderson, Anne. *The Evidence Continues to Grow.* Columbia, MD: The National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1987.

position to have reliable opinions and judgments about those activities and should be the ones to decide the best way to perform those activities.

Some teacher organizations have embraced the call for greater professionalism and are urging local boards of education and central office administrators to institute new procedures that provide for greater involvement of teachers in decisions that affect their lives and those of their students. Cincinnati and Toledo, Ohio, for instance, have instituted peer appraisal programs, and the Dade County, Florida and Hammond, Indiana teachers' unions have negotiated a number of collaborative efforts, including successful pilot programs of school based management.

Evidence is mounting that school based improvement involving teachers can have the following benefits:[2]

- higher morale;
- more positive feelings about school leaders;
- increased commitment to the school;
- lower levels of absenteeism and turnover;
- improved management decisions;
- greater acceptance of change;
- enhanced cooperation and reduced conflict; and
- more effective enforcement of discipline.

Superintendents and board of education members care about the education of all the students in their districts. Otherwise, they would not and should not be in those positions of trust. It is at the local school, however, where the greatest knowledge exists. Staffs and parents know intimately the special nature of the children in their school, their capabilities, and the best ways to educate them. They know the uniqueness of their community, the problems and the joys of each family, and how best to reach those families. The local school, then, is the logical place for decisions to be made about how to educate each student.

All parties to the enterprise are strengthened by the SBI process. When we empower others, we become empowered. When superintendents trust principals and staffs to make more significant decisions about what happens at their school, the superintendent has not lost power or authority but has gained the strength of a united and trusting faculty. When teachers trust the principal to act in the best interest of both the students and themselves, that principal, by empowering them, has now become stronger than he or she could ever be as the sole decision maker in that school.

Educational Strategy

The focus of school based improvement is on improving the educational quality of schools for all the students in them. It is not like categorical programs that are aimed only at targeted student populations. It looks to create effective schools—schools that make a difference for all the students in them.

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[2]Hansen, Barbara J. and Corcoran, Thomas B. *Working in New Jersey Schools: The Conditions of Teaching*. Trenton, NJ: The New Jersey School Boards Association, 1989.

SBI is based, in part, on evidence known as the effective school research. These studies, done by Ronald Edmonds, Wilbur Brookover, Larry Lezotte, and others on schools where all students are learning are especially important because they disprove the myth that schools can't overcome the effects of disadvantaged environments. No longer can schools excuse their poor performance on the premise that students cannot be expected to learn.

Out of these studies has grown a standard that says schools are effective only when *all* students, even those from severely disadvantaged families, are achieving at levels considered acceptable for middle class children. Schools that meet this standard tend to have the following characteristics:

- strong instructional leadership;
- high expectations for both staff and student performance;
- primary emphasis on teaching the basic skills;
- clear instructional mission;
- parents and community involved in the schools;
- positive climate for teaching and learning; and
- program effectiveness measured by frequent monitoring of student progress.

This research has some limitations, however. Most of it was conducted in elementary schools, for instance, so the applicability of the findings to high schools is uncertain. Nearly all of it was conducted in urban areas, which can be very different environments than those of more affluent, suburban settings. Effectiveness was defined as achievement in basic skills—a limited focus some would say. And many of the studies did not address equity and resource issues. In fact, one reason the findings are popular with politicians is the implication that effective schools can be created without additional resources.

Other interpretations of the data are also problematic. Sometimes complex interrelationships have been ignored in an oversimplification of the findings, and assumptions made about cause and effect that the data do not warrant. The effective schools research is useful in diagnosing what may be happening in schools, but its findings cannot necessarily be directly translated into solutions.

All that having been said, the research on effective schools, combined with research on effective teaching and research on working conditions in the private sector, *does* provide a useful framework for improving schools. By adding these other bodies of knowledge, the definition of effective is broadened to what Purkey and Smith[3] call the "good" school. According to them, a good school has 13 characteristics broken into two categories—organizational and structural variables, and process variables. Signs of sound *organization* and *structure* are:

- freedom and flexibility to tailor programs to meet the needs of the school's students—school site management;

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[3]Purkey S. C. and Smith, M.S. "Effective Schools: A Review." *Elementary School Journal*, 83 (1983): 427-452.

- active leadership in setting a school vision, implementing programs and policies, modeling school norms, supporting and motivating staff, and evaluating progress;
- staff stability;
- curricula that are articulated between grade levels and integrated within grade levels;
- school-wide staff development that includes ongoing coaching and is closely related to the school's instructional program and the needs of the school as identified by the staff, not tailored to the needs of individual staff;
- parent and community involvement;
- school-wide recognition of academic achievement; maximized use of learning time both within and outside of school—no interruptions, no pull-outs, assignment of appropriate homework; and
- district support.

The *processes* that lead to the creation and maintenance of good schools are:

- collaborative planning and collegial relationships—staff sharing ideas and information, and making decisions together;
- a sense of community—being recognized as a member of a distinct, supportive group;
- clear goals and high, but realistic, expectations that focus energy; and
- order and discipline with agreed upon rules that are enforced fairly and consistently so all are treated equitably.

Learning is the product of two work forces—students and teachers. The school based improvement process emphasizes creating environments where working conditions for both support student achievement.

Organizational Structure

Districts and schools vary in how they implement the SBI process, but they also share some common features. They all have school site councils where decision making is shared; they have negotiated agreements with their boards of education about which decisions councils are authorized to make; they all operate within the dictates of law, regulations, and local board policy (although special exceptions can be granted); and they have some autonomy in budgeting and spending funds. SBI does not mean every school in a district doing its own thing. The district must continue to play an important role through such things as:[4]

- establishing attendance zones and otherwise determining the composition of the student body;
- defining the criteria for student success or failure with promotion standards,

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[4]Buttram, Joan, Corcoran, Thomas B. and Hansen, Barbara J. *Sizing Up Your School System: The District Effectiveness Audit.* Trenton, NJ: The New Jersey School Boards Association, 1986.

Kirst, Michael W. "Who Should Control Our Schools?" *Education Policy*, National Education Association, January 1988: 74-79

attendance requirements, and local graduation requirements;

- setting the tone for the district and shaping the expectations and work norms of the staff;
- bargaining with employees and enforcing contracts;
- establishing the length of the school day;
- providing research data to the schools;
- raising and allocating revenue;
- planning for enrollment;
- reporting to state and federal authorities;
- providing district-wide programs, including special education;
- providing the political support needed for schools to make their own decisions (and mistakes); and
- monitoring quality control to ensure that schools are meeting district goals.

From their side, the schools can:

- establish goals based on school-wide assessments of needs;
- develop or choose curricula;
- determine instructional methods;
- provide training for parents;
- work in consort with other district schools to align curricula;
- allocate school funds based on goals and needs;
- determine numbers of staff and positions needed, and
- hire staff.

SBI in Action

Perhaps the best way to describe school based improvement is to present it in action, so here is a brief look at a school using an SBI approach:

At Jefferson Middle School, which is in an urban district, many school decisions that were previously made by the principal or central office are now being made by a 15-member school site council. Serving on the council are teachers, parents, students, support staff, and community business people. The principal is a member of the council, but he never chairs it. A smaller group that includes the principal sets the agenda for the council's meetings. When the council tackles a major project, such as the review of a particular curriculum, it often works through subcommittees made up of council members and other interested persons.

Each member of the council is expected to regularly talk to six of his or her colleagues or peers about the issues being considered by the council and to bring their input back to the council. Those six, in turn, are expected to talk with six others. Through this "pyramiding," the entire school community has a say in the decisions of the council.

A central office staff member serves as the council's facilitator during its meetings, which are held during school hours and for which staff receive released time. Her role includes providing the group with information, and she is expected to bring appropriate research findings to the attention of the council. Recently, for instance, she went through the school's state test results with the council after disaggregating the data by race, sex, and socio-economic background. Another of her responsibilities is to help the council arrive at decisions, preferably by consensus. When the council was first formed, she worked closely with its chairperson (one of the parent members) to help him develop his meeting leader skills. Now that the group has grown more comfortable with its decision making process, this help is less needed. The district facilitators received intensive training in group process skills before the school based improvement pilot began.

Jefferson is part of a pilot program in the use of school based improvement that has been underway for over two years. During that time, the council has received four days of training in the SBI process and the leadership skills necessary to make it work. In addition, council chairs and principals from the district's SBI schools have been attending an ongoing series of workshops.

One of the first activities the council engaged in was a needs assessment of the school. Discipline was identified as Jefferson's biggest problem. The council, working with groups of teachers, students, and parents, drew up a new discipline policy and student code of conduct. The policy was implemented this year, and the council is now planning a study of how it is being enforced throughout the school.

Each of the district's SBI schools prepares its own budget, which is submitted to the board of education. Monies are allocated to the schools on a per pupil basis on a district-wide formula. Although the SBI schools do not receive any more money than other schools, they have greater flexibility in determining how it is spent. Jefferson's school site council could, for instance, decide to hire two teaching assistants instead of a teacher, as long as the school's pupil-teacher ratio does not exceed district standards.

The Jefferson council chairperson serves on a district-wide SBI steering committee. This committee is made up of the chairpersons and principals from each SBI school, the district superintendent, the district SBI coordinator, and the presidents of the board of education and the local teachers' association. They meet every month or so to discuss the implementation of SBI throughout the district and to coordinate the efforts of individual schools. Last year, three schools asked, through the steering committee, for waivers to the teachers' contract in order to provide time needed to implement new programs. These waivers were granted by the board and the association.

"Jefferson" is a real school in that everything described is happening in one place or another across the country. Your schools may implement SBI somewhat differently, but all successful SBI schools have these things in common:

- a commitment by all parties to shared decision-making;
- a clear understanding of the scope of council authority; and
- training of councils in group process, school improvement strategies, and techniques of planning.

The first two items must come from the people involved. This book meant to help with the third.

How to Use This Manual

Because school based improvement is idiosyncratic to individual districts (and even schools), no one training program will cover every district's needs. Therefore, the materials in this manual are meant to be added to and revised to fit various situations. For instance, if language in your district's labor contracts is pertinent to your school based improvement process, it should be reproduced, distributed, and discussed during site council training sessions– so also should any relevant state law or regulations. If your district has not yet incorporated parents and/or students into its school teams, then references to them could be deleted from these materials. (But we hope you will lobby for their inclusion.)

These materials can also be reorganized to fit the needs of specific councils. If you are working with groups that have been in existence for some time, you may want to pinpoint what their problems are and devise a training schedule that addresses those first. This flexibility has limits, however. When working with newly formed groups, it is better to teach the planning model in sequence– identifying issues before setting priorities, etc. We also believe that all councils need to have *some* training in each of the areas covered in this manual. Ignoring the "soft" stuff, such as group dynamics and interpersonal relations, in favor of the technical aspects of planning may result in councils that have a hard time reaching decisions. Conversely, focusing solely on interpersonal relations can produce groups that get along beautifully together, but can't accomplish anything.

Training Designs

NCCE staff have used various training designs in their work across the country. However, we have found that the most effective approach in working with newly formed councils is to establish a two year training cycle. During the first year, we conduct the initial training sessions for the councils plus a day or two of training for principals, and we train facilitators to work with the groups.

Facilitators are usually, but not always, central office staff, and they are individuals with demonstrated "people" skills. They meet with the councils on an on-going basis, provide technical and logistical assistance to them, and serve as the link between them and the central office. Facilitators also conduct council training in subsequent rounds of the cycle.

The initial council training (which the material in this manual covers) is conducted in either of two ways:

1) a two-day session plus another, one-day session a month later; or

2) a one-day session plus a two-day session a month later.

The purpose of the break in the training is to provide councils with time to begin planning for needs assessments of their schools and to begin building school profiles (see Part II).

The costs and logistics of bringing in outside trainers dictates the one and two-day format. District-based trainers can be more flexible. It may be even more effective– especially for the modules on planning– to break the training into several shorter sessions focusing on the skills and knowledge necessary to take the next step in the planning cycle.

Not all the training should be short-term, however. Newly formed councils, especially, need time to begin developing teamwork. For this purpose, training is more successful when it is held away from the school, preferably in a hotel or conference center where people can spend the night. Living together for a couple of days is the best way for people to get to know and appreciate one another. Although it is sometimes difficult to get people, especially parents of young children, away overnight, it is worth the effort to try to arrange it.

Throughout the year, teams from different schools hold "cluster" meetings to share experiences, to learn from one another and, where appropriate, to plan collaborative projects. Depending on the configuration of SBI schools in the district, clusters may consist of elementary schools, middle schools, or high schools with their constituent elementary and middle schools.

The district superintendent, key central office administrators, and board members also meet regularly with the principals and the council chairpersons from all the SBI schools. The purpose of these meetings is for chairpersons to learn how the system works (budgeting process, personnel practices, etc.) and to build trust between the schools and the district.

At the end of the first year, we bring the councils together for a review of their accomplishments. This session provides them with an opportunity to share their experiences—the joy of their successes and the frustration of their failures—and builds a communication link among the school based improvement schools. It is also an opportune time to form a district-level coordinating council made up of representatives of each school council. This council's purpose is to facilitate and continue the communication among the schools and to provide a mechanism for communicating with the board of education, superintendent, and central office staff.

During year two, we repeat the initial training program for another set of schools (school based improvement is most successful when phased into a district). At this time, the facilitators augment the training staff. All the first year activities continue with both the veteran and new school councils.

Parent Training

Schools located in communities where parents are estranged from the school face particular problems. Parents may be reluctant to serve on school councils because of language differences, because they think they have nothing to offer, or because they are intimidated by an academic environment. In these situations, parents who serve on councils (and other parents, as well) can benefit from training designed especially for them. Topics should include:

- the role of the teacher;
- the role of the principal;
- formal and informal communications processes;
- the district budget development process;
- personnel selection procedures;
- assertiveness training; and
- how to work together as parents to improve the school.

This training is done in addition to the training of full councils.

The Role of the SBI Coordinator

The SBI Coordinator for the district should be someone who is close to the superintendent in the hierarchy of the district because he or she must have the ear of the superintendent. When problems and conflicts occur—as they will with any new approach to management—the superintendent needs to know about them, and the coordinator must be able to draw on the authority of the superintendent to resolve them.

In addition to being a problem solver, the coordinator is responsible for establishing communications mechanisms among all SBI participants, organizing the district council and for making all training and meeting arrangements.

Council Training Topics

The next section contains nine training modules covering the following topics:

- the roles and responsiblities of school councils;
- effective meetings and decision making;
- teamwork;
- effective schools;
- communicating with the school community;
- conducting a needs assessment;
- setting priorities;
- problem analysis/strategy identification/force field analysis; and
- action planning/identifying potential problems/evaluation.

Our experience tells us this is the minimum training needed to get councils off to a good start. Since each district and school is unique, additional training should be aimed at meeting the specific needs of individual councils.

Part II: The Modules

This section of the manual contains the materials NCCE uses in the initial year of council training. It is divided into nine different modules. Each module begins with a description of the session that contains the following:

Overview/Goals: The goals for the session and a brief description of the session's activities.

Time Required: An approximation of the time required to complete the module activities. The actual time will vary with the size of the group, the activities chosen, and the leader.

Room Set-Up: Suggestions for appropriate room arrangements.

- *Lecture style* means chairs or chairs and tables facing toward the leader. This style is suggested for all presentations and demonstrations. If the group is not too large, a circle or, where tables are used, an open square can also be used. The only important criteria is that all can see the visuals the presenter will be using.
- *Break-out spaces* are recommended for small group work. These may be areas within a larger space or separate rooms. Subgroup members must be able to see and hear one another during these times.
- Total group activities call for a *large circle* or some other arrangement that allows for interaction among all the participants in the training, not just between the leader and the group.

Equipment Required: The training calls for a minimum of equipment. Generally all that may be required are an overhead projector and screen and/or flip chart stands and pads.

Mini-Lecture: "Yes" indicates a mini-lecture is included in the materials. Some modules have more formal lectures than others. Several "mini-lectures" are actually demonstrations of how to use various worksheets that are provided. When visuals have been provided with these materials, they should be shown as indicated during the mini-lecture.

Visuals: A "yes" here indicates that visual masters are included with the module materials. These may be made into overhead transparencies or transferred to flip chart pages. Overheads are the preferred medium if the group is larger than 10 or 15 or if the room is such that seeing flip chart pages is difficult.

Handouts: A list of the module handout materials. They will need to be photocopied for each participant.

Suggested Activities: Some modules contain a number of suggested activities; others have fewer. The trainer will need to chose from among the activities suggested depending on the time available. Some activities will need to be completed following the session and should be assigned as "homework." It is assumed that there will be more than one council team attending each training session. If that is not the case, activities will need to be modified accordingly.

Preparation Required: Actions the trainer should take to prepare him/herself for the session. The list is not intended to be all inclusive; the trainer may have many other things to do, especially if he or she is responsible for making facility arrangements. Even when someone else handles site preparations, a thorough trainer checks all arrangements prior to the session.

Suggested Approach: Conducting the session step-by-step. This is not, however, the only way the module can be handled. Users of this manual are encouraged to adapt the materials to fit their own styles, situations, and the needs of the councils with which they are working. With experience will come confidence and an ability to successfully experiment with the materials and the module formats.

For all of the skillful trainers who use this manual, the following is probably quite unnecessary. But, do have fun doing this training. We all know that this is very serious business—helping children to be competent and caring citizens with richness in their lives. Yet we can make the presentation of these materials dull, stodgy, and unexciting unless each of us as trainers bring liveliness and excitement to our efforts.

So, have fun! Give away presents (silly things) to the person(s) with birthdays that week, to the persons wearing the loudest colors, etc., as you begin these sessions. Do mixing kinds of "getting on board" activities, such as pinned notes on each participant announcing, "My favorite thing to do is_____" or, "The thing I hate to do is_____." You have all used these activities to help groups get started, so be creative and have a great training experience.

Module #1: The Roles & Responsibilities of School Councils

Overview/Goals:

When this module is completed, council members should understand the functions of improvement councils, how they are organized, and the duties of each council member. The session consists of a presentation on the elements of SBI and the organization of councils, followed by an exercise in identifying areas for council decision making. Depending on the time available, the group can then engage in one or more activities that will move them toward organizing their councils and establishing memoranda of agreement with the board of education. The materials in this module must be customized to fit the organizational structure of councils in the district.

Time Required:

One and a half to two hours depending on the activity or activities.

Room Set-Up:

Lecture style at the beginning. Breakout spaces for the activity. Large group discussion at the conclusion.

Equipment Required:

Overhead projector and screen or flip chart pad and stand.

Mini-Lecture:

Yes. This presentation must be customized to fit situations in individual districts.

Visuals:

Yes. These can be made into overhead transparencies or transferred to flip chart pages.

Handouts:

- *School Based Decisions* (instructions and worksheet)
- *Characteristics of Effective School Councils*
- *Council Bylaws*
- *Sample Bylaws*
- *Sample Memorandum of Agreement*

Visuals can also be reproduced for handouts.

Suggested Activities:

In addition to developing a list of desirable authority (see *Activity: School Based Decisions*), councils can:

- Prepare their own bylaws, using the *Council Bylaws* and *Sample Bylaws* handouts.

• Draw up a draft memorandum of agreement to be submitted to the board of education.

• Establish a calendar for the year's council meetings and activities.

If not completed during the session, these activities should be assigned as post-session work.

Other post-session assignments could include: electing the council's officers, scheduling a tour of the school for parent/citizen members of the council, and arranging to have council members introduced to the faculty and staff.

Preparation Required:

• Adapt the mini-lecture to include the history of school based management in your district, how it came to be instituted, how it is being implemented, and how it is/will be supported by the board of education and the central office.

• Prepare overhead transparencies or flip chart visuals.

• Become familiar with the *School Based Decisions* exercise instructions.

• Review the handouts and be prepared to discuss them.

• Make photocopies of handouts.

• Decide on an activity to use with the group.

Suggested Approach:

• Introduce the topic and the session activities.

• Make the presentation on school based management. Allow for questions, comments, and discussion.

• Distribute copies of *School Based Decisions* (instructions and work sheet). Conduct the exercise. When subgroups have completed their tasks, bring the total group together. For each element, review the maximum discretion each subgroup allowed schools. Discuss whether the maximum discretion is feasible and/or desirable. Draw up a list of areas of desired authority.

• Distribute copies of *Characteristics of Effective School Councils, Council Bylaws, Sample Bylaws,* and *Sample Memorandum of Agreement.* Give group a few minutes to read them. Answer any questions.

• Divide group by councils. Allow them time to do the selected activity or activities.

• Bring full group together. Ask councils to report on their accomplishments during the activity period.

• Assign post-session work.

Mini-Lecture: School Site Councils

Show Visual #1

> The school is the decision making unit.

School based management is a form of school district organization that makes the individual school the unit where a significant number of decisions about the schooling of children takes place.

Most school districts are now centrally organized. Such school districts create a physical as well as a psychological distance between the central office and the local school. It is at that local school that parent/citizen concern exists and where the teachers and principal can demonstrate that they care. All else—board of education resolution, administrative and budget decisions, state and federal programs and regulations—have only one purpose: to facilitate what happens at that individual school.

School based management is a decentralized form of organization in which the power and the decisions now made by the superintendent and school board are shared with those who know and care most about the excellence of the education for students—the teachers, the principal, the parents and citizens and the students at each local school.

(Insert information on how and why the decision to move to a school based management approach was made in this district.)

How It Works

At each local school, parents and citizens join with teachers, students, and administrators to form a school council. Parent/citizen members can be elected, appointed, or represent existing parent organizations, such as the PTA or PTO.

Show Visual #2

> Authority can include:
> - conducting needs assessment
> - setting goals
> - developing programs
> - setting budgets
> - hiring and assigning staff
> - planning staff development

Within carefully drawn but not oppressive limits, the school board and superintendent delegate significant decision making authority to the council. Areas that may be included are:

- conducting needs assessments and establishing school goals;
- developing programs to meet school goals;
- establishing school budgets;
- hiring and assigning staff;
- planning staff development.

Each district determines how it will implement school based management and what authority will be delegated to local school councils. Then councils are trusted to make decisions in the best interest of the children of that school.

(Add district-specific information on council authority here.)

Help Provided

Show Visual #3

(Alter this section to include the support offered by the district.)

Help you will receive: *(district data to be entered by trainer)*

Each council has a staff person (usually from the district's central office) to assist them in planning and carrying out their goals and objectives. They are not members of the teams but consultants to them—providing advice, bringing resources to bear and guiding council members through the decision making process. Facilitators have no agenda of their own, but are well-versed in the theory and practice of school based improvement and are skilled in helping people work together in teams.

Council Organization

Show Visual #4

Bylaws Officers Meetings

The council will develop a charter or bylaws to guide its operation. A chairperson or co-chairs, secretary, and other officers are to be selected. Meetings will be held on a regularly scheduled basis, and minutes recorded.

The council acts as a policy-making group and its success depends upon the commitment of its members. Membership should not be treated lightly. Staff members and parents should be asked to participate on the council, not only for their willingness and commitment, but for the skills and expertise they might contribute.

Council Activities

Show Visual #5

Activities

- collect information
- interpret/analyze information
- set priorities
- set up task groups
- develop plans
- review task group reports
- make recommendations
- monitor implementation
- make reports
- evaluate achievements.

Council members:

- collect information about conditions of the school;
- interpret and analyze information;
- set school improvement priorities;
- set up task groups to address school-wide issues;
- develop a school-wide improvement plan;
- review task group reports;
- make program and/or policy recommendations to the central office and board of education;
- monitor implementation of planned activities;
- make reports to staff, central office, school board, and parents; and
- evaluate achievements.

Expectations of Council Members

Show Visual #6

Expectations

- attend council meetings
- act as a link
- write reports
- collect information
- assure objectives are achieved
- contribute to the group
- help function as a team

Council members are expected to:

- attend council meetings;
- act as a link between the council and staff, parents, and community;
- write progress reports;
- collect information pertinent to school improvement plans;
- assume various roles on the council to assure that proposed objectives are achieved; and
- contribute to the group and help members function as a team.

The Role of the Principal

Show Visual #7

Good principals:

- provide full information
- secure support services
- acknowledge importance
- encourage disagreement
- exercise position power with care

Self-confident and wise principals use their councils in as many ways as possible to help them improve student achievement in their schools. They urge knowledgeable and talented people to serve on their councils. These individuals are sometimes critics of the school and its programs, but the principals know that often the best way to turn critics into supporters is to involve them in decisions about the school. Principals can help their councils be more effective by:

- Providing them with full information about the school;
- Securing them support services, such as secretarial assistance, access to copy machines and telephones;
- Acknowledging their importance by publicizing election winners and/or new appointees;
- Being aware that teachers, students and parents may be uncomfortable in disagreeing with him or her in council meetings and helping to establish a group norm that disagreements are expected and even encouraged;
- Taking care in exercising the position power that goes with being a principal so the group does not lose the independence it needs to come up with creative solutions to problems.

The Role of the District

Show Visual #8

District Role

- define council role and purpose
- demonstrate belief in value
- acknowledge efforts
- review council work
- provide training & technical assistance.

(Modify this section to include the steps the board of education and district administration have and/or will be taking to support school based management.)

The district's superintendent and board of education play a key role in determining the effectiveness of their school improvement councils. For councils to be effective, district staff and board members must:

• **Clearly define the role and purpose of the councils.** This is accomplished by preparing a memorandum of agreement that specifies the areas of council authority. In addition, the board and central office may create district guidelines for bylaws, specify certain activities of councils and draw up timelines within which those activities must be accomplished.

• **Demonstrate that they believe councils are a valuable part of the operation of their schools.** They can do this by having key administrators attend council meetings and by providing space, typing, copying and related support for council activities.

• **Acknowledge the effort council members put into their work.** They can recognize council members through certificates of appreciation, by hosting luncheons or dinners for them, by publicizing their efforts and achievements in district newsletters and/or writing news releases about them for local newspapers.

• **Review the work of the councils.** A process should be developed whereby every council report is read by the superintendent, central office, or board or committee of the board and written feedback provided to the council. The district should follow-up on all items that it can address and, whenever possible, implement recommendations of the councils. When implementation is not possible, the council should be informed, in writing, why the district is unwilling or unable to take action.

• **Provide councils with training and technical assistance.** This may be done through district staff or by drawing on resources outside the district.

The Importance of Parent/Citizen Involvement

Show Visual #9

> When parents are involved in their children's education, children go to better schools and children do better in school.

The evidence is clear. When parents are involved in their children's education, children go to better schools and children do better in school. Parents can bring great wisdom to the deliberations of a council if they are truly a part of the decision making process. They know intimately about their own children and their community, and they have access to other parents who can also provide knowledge and insight to the council.

Citizens can also make unique contributions to councils. Senior citizens, parents of non-public school children, local shopkeepers, social service agency, and business people who are a part of the community can all be helpful council members. And their participation helps provide the school and school district with much needed support on budget and bond issue votes and more favorable publicity for the schools.

Activity: School Based Decisions

Directions

Below you will find a list of areas where school councils can be involved in decision making. In groups of five or six, review each element and decide:

1. What position or office currently controls this element? If decision making is shared, who has the greatest authority (formal or informal)?
2. What is the maximum discretion schools could have in this area? Set aside any consideration of the discretion they *should* have for the moment.

You have 30 minutes to complete this assignment. When you are finished, join the rest of the group for a discussion.

Areas of Decision Making

1. Heat, light and power
2. Selection of principals
3. Pupil/teacher/aide ratios
4. Pupil transportation
5. Organization of instruction (e.g., open space, differentiated staffing)
6. Food service
7. Staff evaluation
8. Use of school facilities (e.g. after school use, community use)
9. Evaluation of student progress
10. Staff/parent/community training
11. Selection of instructional personnel
12. Teaching assignments/schedules
13. Instructional methodologies
14. Financing/budgeting
15. Staff development activities
16. Student discipline
17. Textbook/supplies/materials selection
18. Minor maintenance and repair
19. Capital maintenance
20. Student grading/report cards
21. Cleaning schools
22. Curriculum objectives and content

School Based Decisions Worksheet

Element	Controlling Authority	Maximum School Based Discretion Possible

Handout: Characteristics of Effective School Councils

• **Representativeness.** The selection process should guarantee that council membership is truly representative. To do so, it may be necessary to recruit potential candidates from different segments of the community. If elections are the primary vehicle for selection, a mechanism to allow for balancing the group in terms of race, sex, and other variables should be created.

Creating task forces or ad hoc committees as part of the council structure is one way to involve more people in the work of the council and to ensure greater representation. People are often more willing to volunteer their time when there is a specific issue and a timetable that includes a target date for concluding the committee's business.

• **Clear sense of purpose.** Effective councils set yearly goals and objectives through the needs assessment process. Clearly stated objectives and task-oriented strategies give the council a sense of purpose and direction, which guarantees a sense of fulfillment at the end of the school year.

• **Well-defined roles and responsibilities.** Each council member must be aware of his/her responsibilities. Orientation of new members is vital. So also is training in research on effective practices and group dynamics.

• **Action-oriented meetings.** Council meetings need to be guided by well-conceived agendas. Decisions must be made and plans of action developed and implemented. These actions will provide evidence to members and constituents that council meetings are worth their personal time and effort.

Ideally, a council will have nine to 15 members. Research has found that this size group provides enough people to perform a council's functions without making collaborative decision making unwieldy.

Research has also shown that effective councils tend to have chairpersons elected by council members, not appointed by principals. The principal should be a member of the council, but not its leader.

Effective councils meet regularly (a minimum of 9 to 12 times/year) for a minimum of an hour and a half to two hours, since the complex process of assessing, planning, and monitoring cannot be accomplished without sufficient time devoted to it.

• **Recognition of council members.** Each council member should have a personal sense of accomplishment and receive public recognition for his/her services. People need to know they are appreciated and, by being appreciated, are more willing to give of their time.

• **Evaluation.** In addition to evaluating its effectiveness in accomplishing the objectives and strategies contained in school improvement plans, an effective council continually evaluates its own processes and procedures. Councils will continue to have action-oriented meetings when they take the time to periodically evaluate them.

Handout: Council Bylaws

Councils need written policies and procedures to guide their efforts. Usually, these take the form of bylaws. Following are some elements that could be incorporated in a comprehensive, yet flexible set of bylaws:

Purpose

State the purpose and the functions of the council. A simple statement is all that is required, but it should be clear enough so all will understand why the council has been formed and what it is supposed to do.

Membership

Who will be allowed to serve on the council? How many members will there be? Will some people be selected as alternates? Will those who move from the school attendance area be allowed to complete their terms? The local school board may have established policies about who may serve. It could, for instance, establish geographical areas from which representatives are elected. The council may also want to add certain stipulations—especially to ensure broad representation—that do not conflict with state and/or local policy. For instance, one SIC gives preference to appointed members who are willing and able to serve two year terms.

Selection Procedure

How will people be selected to serve on the council. Will they be elected, appointed, or both? How and when will the selections be made or elections held for parents? For students? For teachers? The timing and procedures for elections and appointments are up to the council as long as they meet any state or district requirements. Some schools hold parent elections on Open House Night.

Tenure

How long will members serve? Again, there may certain state or local requirements, but councils may add others. For instance, will members be able to serve consecutive terms?

Councils may want to define procedures for resignation, e.g. a letter to the chairperson, and/or establish criteria for terminating council members who fail to attend meetings, e.g. missing two consecutive scheduled meetings without cause or proper notice to the chairperson.

How will unexpired terms be filled when vacancies occur? Will leaves of absence be permitted? The bylaws of one council state that vacancies of elected members are to be filled by the person with the next highest number of votes in the most recent election and that all replacement members may only finish the term of the person replaced. Another council's bylaws call for vacancies of elected members to be filled through council appointment.

Officers

What officers will the council have? Who may hold these offices? How will they be selected? And when? How long will they serve? Will they be allowed to serve more than one term? How will vacancies be handled? What are the procedures for removing someone from office? Most councils will want to use this clause to ensure that offices rotate among the various groups represented on the council and that no one group holds all the offices at one time. Keep in mind that the most effective councils are those that elect their chairperson.

Duties of Officers

Here is how one council described the duties of their officers:

1. The Chairperson shall preside at all meetings and have general supervision of the affairs of the council. The principal is not eligible to hold the office of Chairperson. The Chairperson will work with the principal in planning and directing the affairs of the council including monitoring committee progress.

   The Chairperson, along with the principal, will prepare the agenda for all meetings, see that the agenda is mailed out at least one week before each meeting, and will have the authority to modify or change the agenda if it is determined to be in the best interest of the council's work. The Chairperson shall appoint temporary or standing committees (ad hoc) as needed and shall be an ex-officio member of all committees.
2. The Vice Chairperson shall exercise all functions in the absence of the Chairperson. The Vice Chairperson will maintain a listing of the membership with phone numbers, addresses, and attendance and will assist the Chairperson as needed.
3. The Secretary is responsible for (a) keeping full and accurate accounts of the proceedings and transactions of all meetings of the council; (b) providing copies of the minutes to the principal and faculty within one week of each meeting so they can be read at the next faculty meeting; (c) preparing any official correspondence that the Chairperson may request; (d) maintaining a "Council File" containing copies of all minutes, council plans and progress reports, any council related information from the district or state, and a current copy of the bylaws; and (e) annually providing a copy of the bylaws to all council members by the third meeting of the year.

Committees

What committees will the council have (ad hoc, standing)? Who may serve on these committees? How will members be selected? How will vacancies be filled? What kinds of procedures may committees establish for themselves? For instance, can a committee restrict its meetings to members only?

Meetings

Where will meetings be held? How often will the council meet? What time will meetings start? When are they expected to end? How will special meetings be called? How will

meeting dates be publicized? Remember, regularly scheduled meetings are essential to accomplishing the work of the council. The council should meet a minimum of once a month.

How will agendas be prepared? Here is how one SIC does it:

> An agenda will be provided by the chairperson in cooperation with the principal. For regular meetings, members will provide suggestions for the upcoming agenda at the end of each meeting. Agenda items can be added on an emergency basis when deemed necessary by the chairperson and/or principal.

Who may attend council meetings? Since councils are public entities, they should be open to the public and anyone showing an interest in the council and its work should be encouraged to attend. Some councils maintain what is called an "open chair," which allows non-council members to voice their opinions or concerns during council meetings. The open chair can be occupied on individual initiative or at the invitation or request of the council.

How will meeting agendas and minutes be distributed? Keeping members and other interested parties informed is important. Some councils post agendas and minutes at the school and in local libraries. Sending copies to the district office and the board of education is also a good idea.

Decision Making

Some councils emphasize consensus decision making and call for that in their bylaws. Others state their willingness to be governed by parliamentary rules, usually the most current edition of Roberts' Rules of Order or another parliamentary guide. If it is the latter, who is eligible to vote? Will proxy votes be allowed? Can alternates vote?

Training

What kinds of training will be provided for council members? This may include an annual orientation session covering information about the roles and responsibilities of council members and operations of the district and school, meetings with the faculty, information expected from the principal, and district technical assistance.

Amendments

What procedure will be used to amend these bylaws? Will amendments have to be "read" at more than one meeting before they are final? Will amendments require a two-thirds majority vote? Two-thirds of the full board or just those present and voting?

Handout: Sample Bylaws

The following is a set of bylaws that councils may wish to consider in developing their plans of operation.*

MISSION STATEMENT

We are here to work cooperatively for the betterment of our school. We believe that all children are capable of learning. We are committed through sensitive, compassionate understanding to provide an atmosphere that encourages students to develop their full potential.

BYLAWS

Purpose

To provide the Council with an established set of rules/procedures under which to function.

Meetings

The Council shall designate a meeting room within the school. Meetings shall be held on a monthly basis in this room unless otherwise necessitated. The length of the meetings will be determined by a prepared agenda.

Agenda

An agenda for the next meeting shall be prepared at the conclusion of each meeting. The agenda will be prepared through consultation by the chairperson, facilitator, and school principal.

Membership

Selection for membership shall be through volunteers. In the event there are more parent/community representative volunteers than there are vacant seats, a lottery shall be held. In the event there are more staff member volunteers than are needed, elections shall be held. The membership of the School Council shall include:

- Three parents and one community representative with one vote each.
- Three professional staff representatives with one vote each.
- One support staff representative with one vote.
- One facilitator with no vote.
- The building principal with one vote.
- One open chair position with no vote.

*Adapted from *Model Bylaws for Allentown's ACCORD Councils*, Allentown, PA, 1988.

Selection of Council Member Replacements

• Parent/Community Representatives: The Council shall seek volunteers for the vacated seat.

• Professional Staff Representatives: Teacher and other certificated staff volunteers shall be selected from the school. An election by the school's professional staff will be held if there are more volunteers than seats available.

• Support Staff Representatives: One volunteer representative from the school's support staff, e.g. custodian, aide, cafeteria worker, shall serve on the Council. An election by the school's support staff will be held if there is more than one volunteer.

Membership Terms

Council membership shall initially be for one, two and three year terms. A lottery shall be held to determine each member's length of service. As terms expire and new members are added, each shall serve for three years. No one may serve consecutive terms on the Council. If a member retires before the end of his or her term, his or her replacement shall serve to the end of the member's term and shall be eligible to serve one additional full term.

Absenteeism

If a member is not present for three consecutive meetings, the chairperson shall contact the person, requesting an explanation of the absences and the member's intentions about remaining on the Council.

Leave of Absence

Leaves of absence shall not be granted.

Agenda Preparation and Distribution

The agenda for the next meeting shall be prepared at the conclusion of each meeting through consultation by the chairperson, the facilitator, and the building principal. A copy of each agenda shall be forwarded to the district School Site Council Coordinator. Copies shall also be distributed to Council members in advance of each meeting.

Council Officers

Council leadership positions shall consist of a chairperson, a secretary, and any other position(s) deemed necessary by the Council. Leadership assignments shall be made at the beginning of each school year through consensus of Council members.

Recordkeeping

The Council Secretary shall compile minutes in a notebook for each school year. A copy of the minutes of the most recent meeting will be posted outside the school office.

Open Chair

The open chair is a position that can be filled by non-Council members attending Council meetings. Persons who take the open chair may briefly state their opinions or concerns. The open chair may also be occupied at the invitation of the Council.

Subcommittees

The use of subcommittees to accomplish tasks of the Council is encouraged. The Council Chairperson shall allocate a period of time at each meeting for reports of subcommittee activities. Subcommittees shall involve as many people as possible who are not serving on the Council.

Decision Making

Decisions shall be by consensus. If, in the opinion of the chairperson, a consensus is not possible, the chairperson will call for a vote by a show of hands.

Communications

There shall be open communication among Council members and the community. Suggestions or concerns may be voiced to Council members, called in to the school, or placed in the suggestion box located in the school.

Each group comprising the educational community (principal, teachers, other professional staff, parents, school support staff, students) shall be regularly informed about Council tasks and given a chance to offer perceptions and opinions related to those tasks.

Handout: Sample Memorandum of Agreement

The following is a sample memorandum of agreement that councils and boards may wish to consider in developing their own.*

Memorandum of Agreement
for
School Site Managment Councils

Purpose of the Agreement

It is the intent of this agreement to clearly define those areas within which the Councils will have the right to function. This agreement also demonstrates with equal clarity, the support that the Board of Education and Central Administration will provide in order to assure the highest level of expectation of success for this ambitious initiative.

Duration of the Agreement

November 1988 – November 1991

School District Commitment

The Board of Education delegates to the members of the School Site Management Councils the authority to review and create school policies and take initiatives in the areas listed below in consultation with their school principals and affected faculty members. Actions and decisions of the councils must be within the boundaries established by law and regulations, district policy, collective bargaining agreements, fiscal prudence and ethical practice. The delegated authority includes decision-making in the following areas:

- enriching the curriculum;
- the development and implementation of special programs for students that complement the school program, such as tutoring, cultural enrichment, homework assistance, extended school day, and so on;

*Adapted from the memorandum of agreement used in the Hoboken, NJ Public Schools.

- the utilization and assignment of support staff, including paraprofessionals;
- the development, organization, and implementation of co-curricular programs for students;
- the organization, scheduling and funding of school events and trips for students and their parents;
- procedures and programs for the recognition of student achievements;
- the development and implementation of student discipline codes and related procedures;
- the development of school calendars within district timelines;
- raising funds to support approved school programs and activities;
- expenditure of discretionary funds or external funds raised by the council;
- identification of improvement priorities for the school;
- issues pertaining to the improvement of the school and its instructional program;
- issues pertaining the the morale of the staff or the quality of the work environment in the school;
- the development and implementation of programs and procedures for the involvement of parents, community members, and business men and women in school affairs;
- the schedule and operations of the councils themselves, including the conduct of the meetings; and
- other items and issues agreed to by the council, the principal, and the superintendent.

Furthermore, the Board asks that building principals consult with their councils, and involve them where appropriate, in determining:

- teaching assignments and schedules;
- staff allocations, and classloads within the school budget;
- student grouping procedures and class schedules;
- maintenance and renovation needs;
- the employment of new staff for the school; and
- procedures for the selection of new council members.

The Board asks that the councils refrain from involvement in matters pertaining to personnel, contract enforcement and grievances, and the authority of the principal to carry out Board policy.

Adopted: November 17, 1988

Visual #1

The school is the decision making unit.

43

Visual #2

Authority can include:

- conducting needs assessments
- setting goals
- developing programs
- setting budgets
- hiring and assigning staff
- planning staff development

Visual #3

Help you will receive:

Visual #4

Bylaws

Officers

Meetings

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Visual #5

Activities

- collect information
- interpret/analyze information
- set priorities
- set up task groups
- develop plans
- review task group reports
- make recommendations
- monitor implementation
- make reports
- evaluate achievements

Visual #6

Expectations

- attend council meetings
- act as a link
- write reports
- collect information
- assure objectives are met
- contribute to the group
- help function as a team

Visual #7

Good principals:

- provide full information
- secure support services
- acknowledge importance
- encourage disagreement
- exercise position power with care

Visual #8

District Role

- define council role & purpose
- demonstrate belief in value
- acknowledge efforts
- review council work
- provide training & technical assistance

Visual #9

When parents are involved in their children's education, children go to better schools and children do better in school.

Module #2: Effective Meetings

Overview/Goals:

The purpose of this module is to make council members aware of the elements of effective meetings, the characteristics of productive discussions, how to make effective group decisions and how to use the brainstorming technique. There are two brief presentations during this session, each followed by an activity. In addition, if time permits, the trainer may choose to include an interpersonal communications activity of his or her choice.

Time Required:

Two hours.

Room Set-Up:

Lecture style and break-out spaces. See activity descriptions.

Equipment Required:

Overhead projector, screen, flipchart stand and pad.

Mini-Lecture:

Yes. There are two brief lectures in this module.

Visuals:

Yes. These can be made into overhead transparencies or transferred to flipchart pages.

Handouts:

- Visuals used in effective meetings mini-lecture
- *Common Obstacles to Listening*
- Visuals used in effective decisions mini-lecture
- *How Decisions Get Made*
- *Brainstorming*

Suggested Activities:

The activities on discussion ground rules, how decisions are made, and brainstorming described in this module, should be included. Other activities could include short exercises in one- and two-way communication.

Preparation Required:

- Become familiar with the points made in the mini-lectures. Rehearse them, using your own words. Use the visuals as your outline and memory-jogger.
- Become familiar with the activities for the session.
- Decide on additional, interpersonal communication activities (if any).
- Reproduce all handouts.

Suggested Approach:

• Introduce the topic and describe what will be taking place over the course of the session. Present the information on effective meetings, display and describe the meeting energy graph. Have the group determine where it is on the graph at that moment. Hand out copies of the graph. Suggest that councils use it from time to time in their meetings.

•Distribute copies of *Brainstorming* and review the rules.

• Ask someone to volunteer to lead the group through a practice session. A possible topic could be the question: How shall we deal with smoking in our group? Remind the group of the rules as they practice.

• Have the group synthesize the items, following the suggestions on *Brainstorming* and arrive at a conclusion. If necessary, have each group member select three choices, then tally the number who selected each item.

• Engage the group in the discussion ground rules activity.

• Engage the group in one or more interpersonal communications activities (selected or developed by the trainer). Distribute *Common Obstacles to Listening.*

• Present the information on effective decisions.

• Engage the group in the decision making activity. Distribute *How Decisions Get Made.*

Mini-Lecture: Effective Meetings

Effective meetings don't just happen, they are planned. Since most of the council's work will be accomplished in meetings, it is important that members do what they can to make council meetings productive. One of the most important things you can do is to encourage participation by all council members. Participation produces a sense of ownership and commitment to the work of the council. Also, the credibility of the council and its members is reinforced by well planned and well run meetings.

In addition, try to remember the meetings you attended that you enjoyed. Was there some food? Did people have fun and enjoy themselves? Start your meetings by asking whether anyone did anything exciting the past week, or "Who can tell us something special that happened to his or her child last week?" Work hard at the serious business you have before you, but remember also to have fun together.

Show Visual #1

Getting Organized
- Know why you're meeting.
- Have a chairperson.
- Have a recorder.
- Set up space for visibility.
- Have materials ready.
- Have an agenda.

Getting Organized

Some suggestions for organizing your council are:

- Know why you're meeting/be clear about the expected results of the meeting.
- Have a chairperson.
- Have a recorder.
- Set up the space so people can see each other easily.
- Make sure all materials are readily available.
- Have an agenda. Set priorities and tentative time limits for each topic. Allow time for the group to discuss how it is functioning as a group.

Show Visual #2

Conducting the Meeting

- Allow time to reconnect.
- Clarify roles.
- Review the agenda.
- Summarize often.
- Test decision making methods.
- Check levels of participation.
- Discuss blocks.
- State next steps.
- Start and end on time.

Conducting the Meeting

Meetings will be more efficiently and effectively conducted if you:

- Start the meeting with some time for people to chat with each other and make sure each person is drawn into the group.
- Clarify roles to be played in the meeting, e.g. discussion leader, recorder.
- Review the agenda and make changes as necessary. Make sure everyone is clear about and in agreement with the tasks to be accomplished.
- Summarize the discussion often.
- Be aware of how the council is arriving at decisions and test to see if group members are happy with the methods they are using. We will talk more about this later in this session.
- Keep a continuing check on people's feelings and their levels of participation.
- If the council gets hung-up and can't seem to resolve an issue, stop the group and spend some time discussing what might be getting in the way.
- State next steps clearly.
- Leave time at the end of the meeting to discuss how it went, what happened and didn't happen, and what needs to be discussed at the next meeting.
- Start and end on time.

Show Visual #3

(Meeting energy graph)

Meeting Energy

During any meeting there will be times when council members' energy will flag and times when everyone will be focused and working hard. Here is a graph that illustrates how this happens. If council agendas are set with this ebb and flow of energy in mind, council members will be able to concentrate on critical issues when the group is feeling most productive, and no one will worry if discussion lags from time to time.

Mini-Lecture: Effective Decisions

Council members are asked to make many different decisions. Some of them relate to how the council is organized and functioning—such things as when and where the council will meet, who will serve as its chairperson, etc. Other decisions have to do with the tasks the council has to perform—how it will conduct a needs assessment, for example. Still others are made to fulfill the purpose of the council—the recommendations for school improvements.

Show Visual #4

Characteristics of Effective Meetings

- Good use of ideas and talents.
- Good use of time.
- High quality decisions.
- Decisions acted on.
- Improved decision making ability.

Effective decisions have five important characteristics:

- **The ideas and talents of the council members have been well used** in arriving at the decision. The topic has been fully discussed and everyone has had an opportunity to give their input.
- **The time spent arriving at the decision has been well used.** All the pertinent data has been presented and analyzed. The group has remained focused on its goal and there has been little "wheel spinning."
- **The decision is correct, or high in quality.** In other words, it accomplishes what the council set out to do. Sometimes it takes a while to determine whether this criteria has been met.
- **The decision is acted on by group members.** The members are committed to the decision and take whatever action is needed to ensure the decision's implementation.
- **The decision making ability of the group is improved.** The decision making process was a learning experience for the council.

Activity: Ground Rules for Discussions

(Directions to trainer)

Time Required:

Three to five minutes to get organized; 15 minutes for groups to brainstorm; three to five minutes to reconvene group; 20 minutes for reporting out and synthesizing the list.

Equipment:

If possible, each group should be given the use of a flipchart stand, pad, and markers.

Room Arrangement:

Circles of six or seven chairs, if room size permits. Otherwise, use breakout spaces. (Increase time to get organized by the time needed to reach breakout rooms.)

Directions:

1) Divide the group into subgroups of six or seven. Try to mix members of various councils.

2) Introduce the activity by saying something like: Before a council reaches a decision, there is often a lot of discussion. A good discussion is one that is open, with all members sharing their ideas. Brainstorm a list of ground rules you believe individuals should follow during council discussions. You have 15 minutes to create your lists, then we will reconvene to report out to the full group.

3) Monitor the work of the subgroups during their brainstorming.

4) At the end of the time period, ask subgroups to post their lists where they can be seen by the full group. Reconvene the full group.

5) Ask each subgroup to state the items on their lists, clarifying as necessary.

6) Ask the full group to find the common items. Post them on a flip chart. Ask them to identify items that may not be common to all lists but are particularly good suggestions. Post those as well. Below are some that you might want to add if they have not already appeared.

- Come prepared to talk about agenda items. If everyone does their homework, meetings will be more efficient and decisions more effective.
- Listen carefully to what others say. Try to understand their point of view. See if you can learn something from them.
- If you don't understand what is being said, say so. Ask for examples and illustrations.
- Join in on the discussion. Don't wait to be called on. Say what you think. The other council members need to know your thoughts on the subject.

- Don't speak too long or so often that others do not have a chance to speak.
- Disagree when necessary, but keep it friendly. State why you hold your opinions, but don't insist on their being accepted by others.
- Never argue a question or point of fact. It is a waste of time. Look up the answer or have someone do it for the next meeting.

7) Tell the group you will have the list typed and distributed to them.

Activity: Decision Making

(Directions to trainer)

Time Required:

Three minutes to get organized, 10 minutes to engage in fish bowl discussion, 10 minutes to discuss observations.

Room Arrangement:

Two circles of chairs: an inner circle of 10 surrounded by chairs for the remainder of the group.

Equipment Required:

None.

Directions:

1) Tell the group that they are about to demonstrate how decisions are made in groups through an activity called a "fishbowl." Tell them you will need 10 volunteers who will take the chairs in the inner circle, engage in a discussion, and arrive at a group decision. The rest of the group will observe the discussion and how the inner group arrives at its decision.

Note: If total group is fewer than 10, appoint one or two people to be observers of the rest.

2) Organize the inner and outer groups.

3) Give the inner group a decision to make. Try to select something that will be fun, but with some substance. Some ideas are:

- What name could we give to this group that would be catchy and, at the same time, convey to the community what we are about?
- What is the most important issue the board of education needs to address in this district?
- What do you think should be the most important qualification to be a principal in this district?
- If money were no object, what would you do so that the children of this district would be better served?

4) Allow the group to arrive at a decision. If they have not made one within 10 minutes, urge them to proceed with haste. Call an end to the exercise after 15 minutes.

5) Reconvene the full group. Ask the observers to report what they saw happening. Did anyone seem to take control? How? Why did people grant him or her that authority? Was there a faction of people who supported one proposal or another? Did the group arrive at a decision? How? Was there consensus or did the majority rule? Ask members of the inner group to talk about how they felt during the discussion. Did they feel included in the decision making process? Do they support the final decision?

6) Hand out *How Decisions Get Made.* Review and discuss each of the decision making styles, relating them to what transpired during the exercise.

7) Review the "Fist Five" technique for testing consensus. Suggest that councils use this technique in their decision making.

Handout: Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a excellent technique for developing innovative ideas and having everyone share their thoughts. In order to brainstorm, you will need to have a chalkboard or a flip chart and stand and one person to act as the recorder. (Two recorders are helpful, as ideas tend to come very fast.) There are a few simple rules that must be followed:

- List every idea as it is given no matter how far out it seems to be.
- Don't judge whether ideas are good or bad—just call them out. Even silly ideas stimulate new, creative ideas in yourself and others.
- Don't explain your idea—be brief.
- Don't try to "sell" your idea—simply state it.
- No discussion or comments until after the list is complete.
- It is all right to repeat an idea or to add to one already listed.
- Work quickly.
- Invite everyone to participate, but don't force it.
- When the flow of responses slows down, stop the process.

Next Steps

- Originators should explain items that are unclear.
- Delete duplications.
- Group like items; reword items with approval of originators. Reduce the list to as few as possible, but do not distort anyone's idea in the process.
- Rewrite final list on a clean sheet of paper.

Handout: Common Obstacles to Listening

Speaking is only half of a discussion. If no one is listening, communication is not taking place. While we are all guilty at times of not paying attention to what is being said, this can prevent the council from making effective decisions. Following are some traps to avoid during discussions.

Talking: You can't "receive" while you're "sending."

Thinking of what you are going to say when you're supposed to be listening.

Mentally arguing with the person who is talking.

Preoccupation: Thinking about something else while someone else is talking.

Impatience: Feeling annoyed with the speaker.

Poor environment: Noise or other distractions in the room; physical discomfort.

Divided attention: Trying to pay attention to someone or something at the same time as you are listening to someone else.

Not realizing that listening is work: Listening is not passive. The listener must work to listen and absorb what the speaker is saying.

Mental criticism of grammar or appearance.

Mental or physical fatigue.

Failure to "see" the speaker: Meaning is conveyed through expressions, tone and gestures as well as words.

Two senders, no receivers: Two people talking at each other at the same time.

Handout: How Decisions Get Made

Councils can arrive at decisions in a number of ways. Some of them are more effective than others.

By default: a decision arrived at by not making a decision. This may seem contradictory, but *not* making a decision is, in fact, deciding a course of action– to do nothing. Doing nothing may be an appropriate response to a situation, but decisions arrived at by default can leave people wondering about what is to happen.

Self-authorized decisions: decisions made by one or more members of the council who assume they have the authority to make them, but actually do not. Such decisions can come as a surprise to other council members and, chances are, they will have little commitment to them.

Cliques: decisions made by a few individuals who have joined forces and who then try to impose their views on others. These can result in dividing the group into competing factions.

By authority: decision made by the chairperson or someone else who has been delegated authority by the group. Sometimes these decisions are made after consulting with the group; sometimes not. Setting an agenda is one example of this type of decision making. Obviously this kind of decision making can be abused easily, and care must be taken by anyone in authority not to trample on the rights of the group as a whole.

Majority rule: decisions arrived at through voting. Those on the losing side of a vote may have little commitment to the decision, so this style of decision making is best used with decisions of lesser importance.

Consensus: decisions arrived at after thorough discussion of all possible alternatives, where everyone has had plenty of opportunity to be heard, and where, ultimately, everyone believes that the final choice is the best that can be made under the circumstances. This style of decision making can take a long time, but it creates the highest commitment, so it is the style most appropriate to important decisions.

One way to test for consensus is to use a "fist five." This concept is a quick way to check whether there is agreement when people seem to have dealt with the information. One group member asks each of the others to indicate their support for a particular decision as follows:

At the count of three, indicate your support by putting up:

- five fingers– meaning, "I'm for it and will work hard for it;"
- four fingers– meaning, "I'm for it, will work hard, and have a reservation or two;"
- three fingers– meaning, "I'm for it, have serious reservations, yet will go along with it;"

- two fingers– meaning, "I don't like it, won't work for it, but won't work against it;"
- one finger– meaning, "I don't like it, won't work for it, and probably will not work against it– but I'm not sure;"
- fist– meaning, "I'll actively work against it– cannot support it as it stands."

If a group has members who raise their fists, one, or two fingers, it is not yet ready for consensus. Those who are not supporting the decision need to be asked why. Discussion must continue until consensus is reached.

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Visual #2

- **Core of knowledge to be mastered by all.**
- **Objectives for each grade level.**
- **Appropriate instructional materials.**
- **Progress measured.**
- **Communication about school progress.**

Visual #3

- **Teachers believe all students can learn.**
- **Teachers compliment teachers/ students.**
- **Heterogeneously grouped classes.**
- **Children not rigidly grouped.**
- **Variety of approaches used.**

Visual #4

- New approaches tried if skills not mastered.
- Students rewarded for efforts/performance.
- Equal access to opportunities.
- Parents notified of success.
- Student leadership opportunities.

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Visual #5

- Initiates discussions re. student achievement.
- Reviews lesson plans.
- Ensures curriculum alignment.
- Provides staff development.
- Involves all affected by decisions.
- Communicates vision.
- Visits classrooms/observes teachers.

Visual #6

- **Principal protects learning time.**
- **Students expected to achieve 80% minimum.**
- **Basic subject requirements for all.**
- **Regularly assigned/checked homework.**
- **Active and direct instruction.**
- **Consistent standards for promotion.**
- **Skill mastery required.**

Visual #7

- **Discipline code consistently enforced.**
- **All informed re. code.**
- **Recognition for positive behavior.**
- **Building clean/well maintained.**
- **Teachers model behavior/ academic commitment.**
- **Teachers prepared/prompt.**
- **All treated with respect.**
- **Parents quickly notified re. problems.**

Visual #8

- Annual norm-referenced, standardized tests.
- Variety of techniques used to measure progress.
- Tests aligned with curriculum.
- Prompt feedback to students.
- Instruction modified based on student performance.
- Principal monitors student progress.
- Parents kept informed.
- Test results reported to community.

Visual #9

- **Parents understand role in school goals.**
- **Organized parent group supported by school.**
- **Structured participation in school decisions.**
- **School policies openly discussed with parents.**
- **Multiple communication modes used.**
- **School/classrooms open to parents.**
- **Complete information re. child's progress provided.**

Module # 5: Communicating with the School Community

Overview/Goals:

The purpose of this module is to raise council member awareness of the value of two-way communication with the full school community—parents, citizens, students, board of education, teachers and other school staff—and to provide them with suggestions for reaching out to the community. The session consists of a presentation on ways to communicate with the school community and one or more activities designed to increase council/community communications.

Time Required:

One to three hours.

Room Set-Up:

Lecture style at the beginning, then to roundtables or break-out spaces for activities.

Equipment Required:

Overhead projector and screen or flipchart easel and pad; flipcharts and markers for each subgroup.

Mini-Lecture:

Yes.

Visuals:

Yes. These can be made into overhead transparencies or transferred to flip chart pages.

Handouts:

- *Newsletter Tips*
- *Making Effective Presentations*

Visuals can also be used as handouts.

Suggested Activities:

Depending on the time available, councils can engage in one or more of the following:

- Drawing up a council communications plan for the year.
- Brainstorming a list of "key communicators."
- Selecting one or two of the suggestions from the mini-lecture and developing plans for implementing them.
- Analyzing the school's newsletter against the criteria contained in *Newsletter Tips*.
- Preparing and giving a presentation on the council's activities to date.

Preparation Required

• Become familiar with the suggestions made in the mini-lecture. Rehearse the lecture, using your own words. Use the visuals as your outline and memory-jogger.

• Photocopy handouts.

• Select one or two of the above suggested activities to use with the group or design your own.

Suggested Approach

• Introduce the topic and the session activities.

• Make the presentation, encouraging discussion of each of the suggestions. At the end of each section, ask participants for additional suggestions.

• Hand out and review the contents of *Newsletter Tips* and *Making Effective Presentations.*

• Assign the chosen activities. Monitor group progress.

• At the end of the alloted time, reassemble the entire group for brief discussions of their accomplishments (or presentations, if that activity was selected). If councils did not develop communications plans during the training session, ask them to do so as the post-session assignment.

Mini-Lecture: Communicating with the School Community

No school improvement council will be effective without the support of the total school community—staff, parents, citizens, and students. This support will be earned through two-way communication and by involving as many people as possible in the life of the school and the work of the council. This presentation will describe some methods your council can use to involve others and to communicate constructively with all members of the school community.

Involving Others

Show Visual #1

Involving Others
- Classroom resources lists
- Activity sponsors
- Adopt-a-School program
- Joint activities with school groups

Research has shown that schools with better student outcomes are those that welcome parents and community members and actively seek their involvement in the life of the school. One council goal might be to help bring people into the schools. Some possible activities are:

• Establish a volunteer program where parents and other community members help in the library and classrooms.

• Create lists of classroom resource people—citizens who are willing to share a hobby, give a presentation on a business or trade, share highlights of out-of-state or foreign travel, or discuss their interests with appropriate classes.

• Identify civic clubs, community organizations, and businesses that may be willing to sponsor specific, recurring school projects, such as science fairs, career awareness days, etc.

• Establish an adopt-a-school program where employees of business and industry are released by their firms to serve as career counselors, management advisers, maintenance consultants, or to provide assistance in other areas of school need.

Similarly, councils can, and should, involve others in their work. Some ways to do this are:

• Develop close ties with the school's parent-teacher organization, booster club, Chapter 1 Parent Advisory Council, faculty senate, student council and all other organizations within the school. Jointly sponsored projects can build collaboration and reduce any feelings of competition that may arise between the council and other groups. Some joint activities might be:

- Council elections and appointments;
- Presentations of the school's improvement plans to parents/citizens at public or PTA meetings;
- Newsletters, information brochures, or similar publications;
- Surveys/questionnaires to parents, teachers, and/or community;
- School/community priority setting for budget, curriculum, building and/or material needs;
- Meetings;
- Recognitions or award ceremonies.

Show Visual #2

Task Forces
- Needs Assessment
- Discipline
- Safety
- Attendance
- Human Relations
- Problem Prevention

• Establish task forces and committees. A task force is a group with a specific, short-term mission. A committee has a standing assignment to cover a major area of activity. Task forces can be assigned to gather information on a specific topic and bring recommendations to the council. Among the task forces a council might create are:

Needs Assessment Task Force: The development of a school-wide improvement plan depends on a thorough assessment of school and student needs, which then becomes part of an on-going planning-implementation-evaluation process. A needs assessment task force can help plan strategies for conducting and interpreting needs assessments.

Discipline Task Force: Many parents place discipline at the top when asked what concerns them most about schools. But the definition of discipline differs from one community to another. This task force can assist the principal and school staff by finding out what is expected by parents, what support will be given by parents, and what assistance is available to school personnel in unusual disciplinary cases. The task force may also be involved in developing or revising school discipline policies.

Safety Task Force: Street crossings, bus stops, hazardous walks, train crossings, lonely roads, vicious dogs, bullies and gangs, and many other factors present barriers to safe journeys to and from school for many children. A safety task force could survey the school neighborhood for such spots, contact the proper authorities, study laws that govern school transportation, and try to provide a safe trip to school for every child.

Attendance Task Force: The school's student attendance and truancy rates could be studied and, if warranted, programs to increase attendance could be developed. An outreach program to parents of chronically absent children could be established and/

or awards could be arranged for individual, classes, or grades for good attendance or improvement in attendance. Social service agencies could be alerted in cases of frequent truancy.

Human Relations Task Force: The objective of this group would be to help curtail rumors and create a positive image of the school, especially concerning racism and sexism. Desegregation in our schools has not necessarily brought about integration. Federal regulations have not necessarily brought about equal opportunity for female students or educators. A full study with recommendations for improvement, if necessary, would help to build stronger human relationships within the school family.

Problem Prevention Task Force: From time to time, issues arise that require immediate or long range attention. Although the problems differ, the process for reaching solutions may be similar and can be repeated. When a problem is identified by the council, this task force would assess the problem, set objectives, develop a plan, implement the plan, and then evaluate the results. Members of the group would have to be alert to comments of citizens that indicate something is not operating as it should or that an element is missing from the school program. Problems are easier solved before they erupt. .

Show Visual #3

Committees

- Finance and Budget
- Curriculum
- Communications
- Legislative

Most councils also establish committees to divide the general workload into manageable parts. Service on these committees may also be open to parents and others in the community. Committees could include:

Finance and Budget Committee: Allocations and expenditure of school dollars are often the cause of misunderstanding between educators and community members. Budgets are relatively complicated documents and can intimidate those who are unfamiliar with them. A budget committee could learn about the school district budget and serve as interpreter as well as receiver of suggestions from citizens. Comparisons of current and proposed budgets could be made and percentages of increases/decreases analyzed to determine their impact on the school. Recommendations for changes to proposed budgets could be presented to the council for consideration and, with its approval, sent to the board of education.

Curriculum Committee: Parents are interested in the quality of education their children receive. They want to know more about course content than nearly anything else about the school. This task force could work closely with school staff and consult with them on curriculum development and textbook, audio-visual, and computer soft ware selections.

Communications Committee: This group could assist the council in carrying out some of the suggestions made in this chapter.

Policy Committee: In addition to keeping track of school board policy, this group may monitor legislation that affects public education. Visits to the state legislature, meetings with members of the county delegation, letters to U.S. congressmen or senators to lobby for specific proposals may also be included in the task force's charge. A major role could be to educate community members concerning current issues. The committee could sponsor community forums at the school with all citizens invited to attend.

Show Visual #4

Getting Information to the School Community
- "Key Communicator" program
- Annual school directory
- Newsletter
- Presentations
- Council minutes
- Student newspaper
- Suggestion/question box
- Council booth

Spreading Information to the School Community

Councils can use many ways to send information about the school and the council's activities to the school community. A few of them are:

• Establish a "key communicator" program. Every school community has individuals who are in daily touch with many people. The corner grocer, a popular waitress at a local restaurant or cafe, librarians, ministers, mail carriers, municipal governing body members, beauticians—the list is endless—can serve as key communicators of information about the school to the community. Each council member could enlist at least five such people to serve as key communicators. Make sure these people are kept informed about what is happening in the school and about the activities of the council.

• Prepare an annual school directory that describes the school, its programs and facilities and any special projects, and lists faculty and staff, school council members, and the school's objectives for the upcoming year.

• Publish a regular school/council newsletter. If the school already has one, make sure every issue covers council activities.

• Make presentations about the school and the work/recommendations of the council to the PTA, the board of education and to various community groups, such as the local Chamber of Commerce, senior citizens groups, women's groups, etc.

• Distribute the minutes of council meetings as widely as possible. Post the most recent minutes near the entrance to the school so parents can see them when they visit. Post another in the school's faculty room. Ask the local library to keep a file of them, along with a sign announcing their availability. Print a summary in the newsletter.

Send copies to the central office and the board of education. Share them with other school councils in your district.

• One of the most effective ways to get information to the parents of high school students is through the student newspaper. Ask the council's student representative(s) to write articles about council activities for the paper and/or ask the paper's advisor to have a reporter cover council meetings.

• In rural and suburban areas, telephone trees work well. A lead parent for each class calls four or five others, who then call four or five more.

• Put a suggestion/question box in a school location convenient to parents. Respond to each item placed in it in the next issue of the newsletter.

• Set up a council booth at back-to-school nights, school open houses, and parent orientation sessions.

Show Visual #5

Listening to the Community
- List of "publics"
- Neighborhood coffees
- Key communicators
- Open forum
- Telephone interviews

Listening to the Community

In addition to building support for the school, councils need the input of their communities to develop recommendations for improvement and to prepare progress reports. Following are some ways they can do this.

• Canvas the community and establish a list of all the "publics" represented by the school council. Senior citizens, parents of pre-schoolers, non-parents, special interest groups, parents of private school students, religious groups, ethnic groups, governmental agencies, and civic club members are all publics. Establish a key contact person on the council to serve as a link with each public. Make sure each group is considered and included in all surveys and opinion polls the council conducts.

• Hold neighborhood gatherings in people's homes for food and coffee in a relaxed atmosphere. This "tried and true" method of acquainting citizens with their school is also a good way to get input on community concerns. Printed material may be distributed, a videotape presentation of the school may be given and/or the principal or a teacher may conduct a question and answer session. But the focus should be as much on listening as it is on giving information.

• Ask your key communicators to convey to the council any messages, rumors, and concerns that they hear from the community.

• Hold a series of short panel discussions presented by council members and the school principal, followed by open forums where citizens can express their ideas and suggestions about curriculum, facilities, materials, legislation, accountability, public

relations, or anything else about the school that is on their minds. Consider holding them at various places in the area—churches, clubs, community centers, libraries, etc.

• Conduct telephone interviews. A good time to do this is during the months of December and January. A sampling of public opinion at the mid-point in the year can help the council know how well parents understand the school's progress or lack of it.

Handout: Newsletter Tips

If your council decides to produce a newsletter as a way to communicate with your school community, here are some hints on how to make it effective.

- Decide who your audience will be. Will the newsletter go to staff? Parents? Community members? Each of these audiences is likely to want different types of information about the school. Parents may be interested in new school programs; community members want to know the latest school test results; teachers may be curious about the council's plans and activities. You don't need to produce separate newsletters, just keep all your audiences in mind in each issue.
- Ask a variety of people (teachers, administrators, parents, students) to write stories about specific topics for specific issues, so the burden of writing does not always fall on the same person.
- Include articles about faculty and other staff members, students, student projects, coming events, past events, test results, educational theories and practices, school resource needs, discipline standards, and curriculum.
- Keep stories as short as possible. Be sure the first paragraph answers the questions: who, what, where, when, why, and how.
- If a substantial number of parents do not speak English, publish an edition in their language. If the numbers are small, include an article or two in that language in each issue.
- Avoid jargon at all costs. Keep writing straightforward and simple.
- Be positive, not negative.
- Be accurate and objective. If an opinion is included, say whose opinion it is.
- Always identify people by their titles or positions (teacher, administrator, parent, student, etc.).
- Use headlines to capture interest and to convey the central idea of the story.
- Make your newsletter attractive by:
    - using line drawings, charts, maps and graphs where appropriate;
    - making headlines stand out by typing in bold or, if using a typewriter, in all caps;
    - using the same type style throughout (except for headlines);
    - leaving plenty of white space between stories and columns and around borders;
    - using at least two columns on a page; and
    - proofreading carefully.
- Give your newsletter a name that includes that of your school.

• Have your newsletter printed or photocopied if at all possible. Dittos and mimeographs are hard to read. Black type on white paper is easiest to read.

• Be aware that materials sent home with students are frequently "lost" and the problem gets worse as the students get older. You may need to budget for mailing.

• Make sure your local library gets a few copies. Ask the librarians to make them available to their patrons. It is also a good idea to put a stack at the local convenience store or newsstand.

Visual #1

Getting Organized

- Know why you're meeting.
- Have a chairperson.
- Have a recorder.
- Set up space for visibility.
- Have materials ready.
- Have an agenda.

Visual #2

Conducting the Meeting

- Allow time to reconnect.
- Clarify roles.
- Review the agenda.
- Summarize often.
- Test decision making methods.
- Check levels of participation.
- Discuss blocks.
- State next steps.
- Start and end on time.

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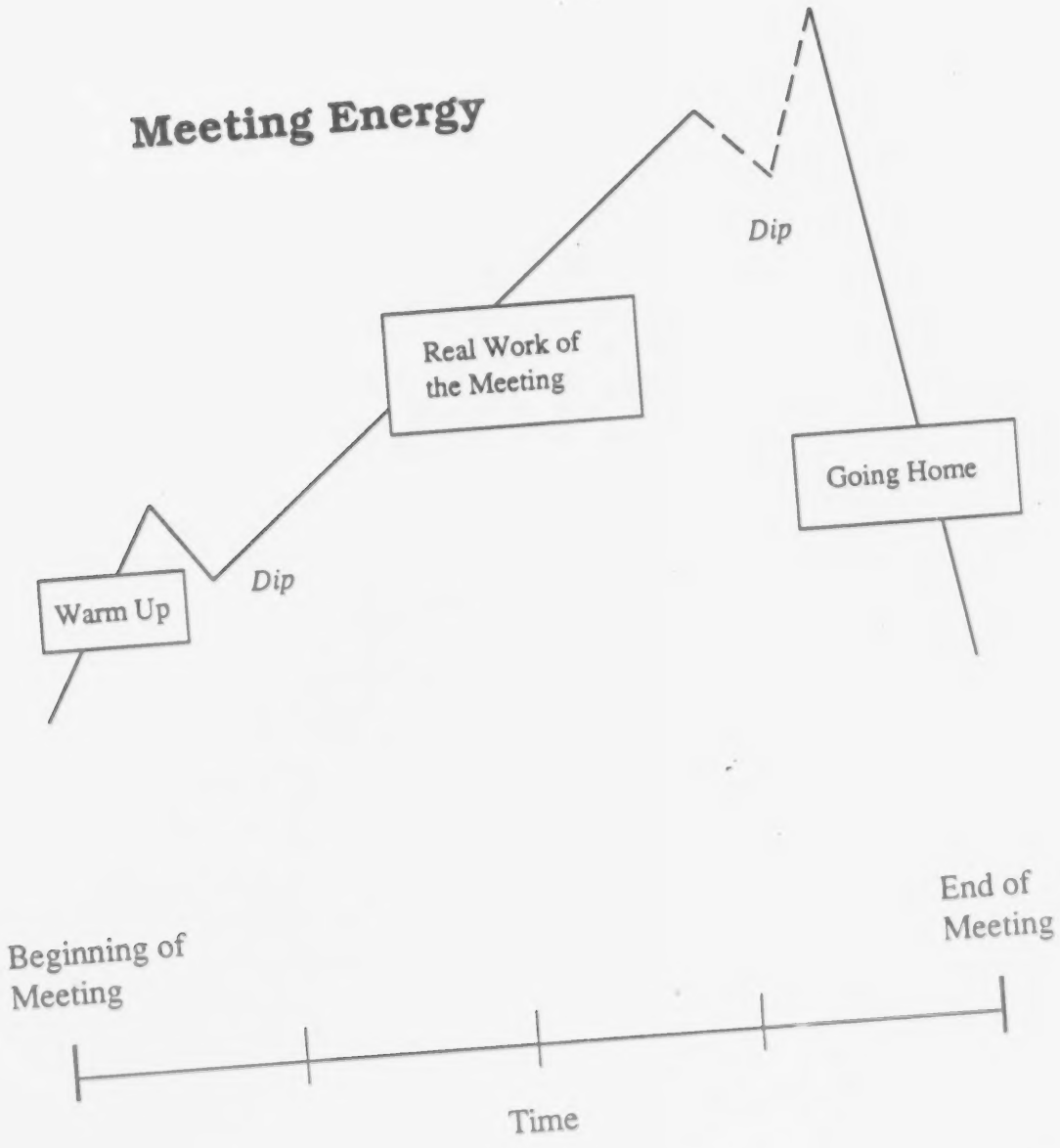
Visual #3


Meeting Energy
Dip
Real Work of the Meeting
Going Home
Warm Up
Dip
End of Meeting
Beginning of Meeting
Time

Visual #4

- **The ideas and talents of the council members have been well used.**
- **The time spent arriving at the decision has been well used.**
- **The decision is correct, or high in quality.**
- **The decision is acted on by group members.**
- **The decision making ability of the group is improved.**

Module # 3: Teamwork

Overview/Goals:

The purpose of this module is for council members to become aware of the importance of teamwork, the way it develops, and how they can assist in that process. The session consists of an interactive presentation about teamwork, a brief presentation on the stages of group development, and an analysis by councils of the developmental stage of their teams. If time permits, the trainer can include a team building activity of his/her design or choice.

Time Required:

One hour.

Room Set-Up:

Chairs set in a circle.

Equipment Required:

Flipchart pad, easel, and markers; overhead projector and screen (optional).

Mini-Lecture:

Yes. The first—on teamwork—is an interactive presentation. The second—on the team development wheel—is just the description of the graph.

Visuals:

None are included. However, points from the teamwork discussion should be posted on the flip chart. The team development wheel can be used as a transparency as well as a handout.

Handouts:

Team Development Wheel

Suggested Activities:

In addition to the analysis of team development, the trainer may organize a team-building exercise of his/her own creation or choice.

Preparation Required:

- Become familiar with the key points on teamwork contained in the mini-lecture and the description of the team development wheel.
- Reproduce the team development wheel as a transparency and/or for distribution.
- Choose or create a team-building activity.

Suggested Approach:

- Introduce the topic and the session activities.
- Ask the following questions and post responses on the flip chart.

1) What criteria would you use to judge whether a council is effective or not?

2) What behaviors by team members would cause a council to fail?

3) What can council members do to ensure the success of the council?

Add any points from the mini-lecture that the group has not mentioned.

- Present the information on the team development wheel.
- Subgroup by councils. Have councils determine their position on the wheel at this time and identify actions they can take to move toward maturity as a team. If this module is part of a longer training session, the team development wheel can be used at the end of another activity.
- End the session with a suggestion that councils use the team development wheel every three or four months to examine their progress and refer to it whenever they feel the group is not achieving what it hoped it would.

Mini-Lecture: Teamwork

Note: The following points should be brought out in the course of discussion.

A School Improvement Council is effective when:

- all council members feel responsible for the team, the goals it has set, and the success of its activities;
- important decisions are made jointly, after everyone has had an opportunity to express their opinions;
- it encourages the free exchange of ideas by asking all members for their opinions during discussions;
- it plans its meeting agendas and activities, but is willing to alter them as circumstances change;
- it supports its members when they try new skills; and
- it evaluates how well it is doing as a team from time to time.

A School Improvement Council will fail if its members:

- block the work of the council by being negative or stubbornly refusing to agree, even after the team has come to a decision;
- attack other members of the team, deliberately hurt their feelings, belittle them or try to take credit for what they have done;
- refuse to take the work of the council seriously;
- are boastful about personal achievements or try to make themselves appear better than others;
- withdraw from the group and refuse to participate in its discussions or its work;
- argue for the point of view of only a certain segment of the school community rather than represent everyone with an interest in the school;
- try to dominate the council and gain attention for themselves; or
- take it personally if others criticise their position on issues.

Council members can assist the team by:

- initiating ideas, making suggestions for procedures, and proposing tasks;
- asking for clarification of what has been said and seeking suggestions and ideas from others;
- expressing what they think or feel and offering information;
- clearing up points of confusion, offering examples and clarifying alternatives before the group;
- summarizing discussions so the group knows what it has accomplished;

- testing the practicality of suggestions by applying them to real situations;
- checking to see if decisions have been reached or the work of the group almost concluded;
- keeping channels of communication open and encouraging everyone to make contributions;
- helping others reconcile their disagreements, find common ground, and recognize their similarities as well as their differences;
- encouraging others by listening with interest to what they say and by being warm, friendly and responsive to them.

Mini-Lecture: Team Development Wheel

Teamwork develops over time. Typically, councils go through four stages.

Stage 1:

When people first meet, they tend to be polite, but guarded. They are often reluctant to express their personal feelings because they are not sure how others will react to them. Some may feel intimidated by the positions others hold. Teachers may feel this way about their principal; parents may feel the same about teachers. This is the testing period.

Stage 2:

As people get to know each other somewhat better, they begin to share their feelings and opinions and, at this point, conflicts may arise. Certain people may react by attacking the people they disagree with or who disagree with them. Others may simply opt-out and, thus, avoid the conflict. This is a period of infighting. Some councils get stuck at this stage and never develop true teamwork.

Stage 3:

Other councils, however, develop strategies for overcoming their conflicts. They learn how to confront issues instead of people and how to give constructive feedback. This is the period of getting organized.

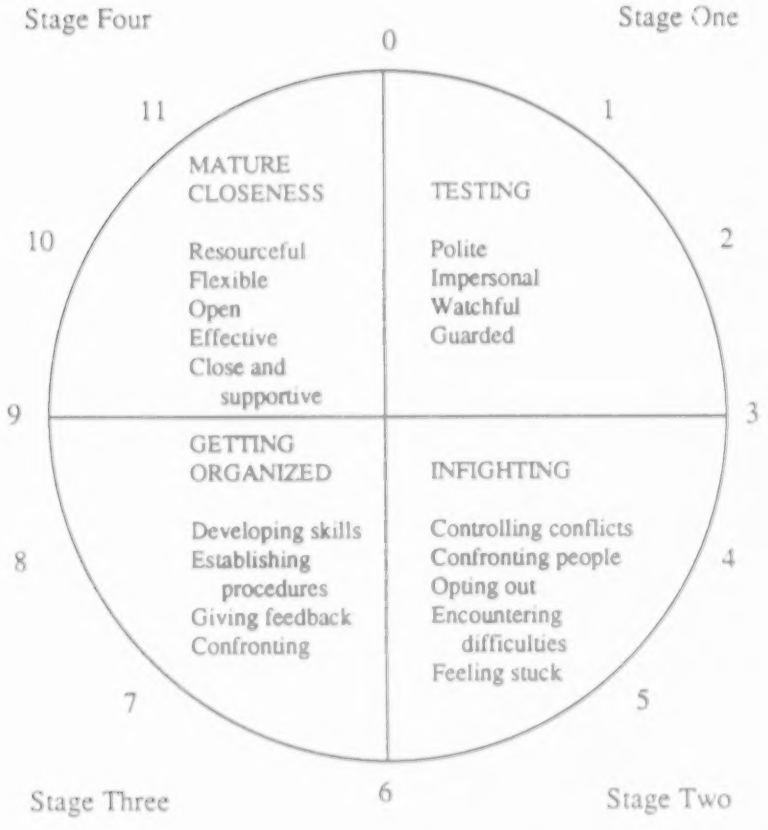
Stage 4:

Councils that overcome the hurdles of Stage 2 and gain the skills of Stage 3 become open, flexible, warm and supportive. It is at this stage of mature closeness that councils are the most resourceful and effective.

Use this wheel to gauge where your council is in this developmental process and check it every once in a while, especially if it seems like you are stuck at Stage 2. And remember—as new members join the council, the team's stage of development can change.

Handout: Team Development Wheel

Place a mark on the circumference of the wheel to indicate how well you think your council is functioning as a team at this time.



Date:_____

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Module #4: SBI and Effective Schools

Overview/Goals:

The purpose of this module is to explain the research on effective schools and how councils might apply those findings to individual school settings. The mini-lecture describes the characteristics of schools where all children are learning at levels appropriate for their age and the exercises cover developing a school mission and identifying important indicators of those characteristics in local schools.

Time Required:

45 minutes for the mini-lecture. Another 90 to 105 minutes for the two exercises.

Room Set-Up:

Lecture-style, then at roundtables or breakout spaces for the exercises.

Equipment Required:

Overhead projector and screen or flip chart stand and pad. Flip charts, easels and marking pens for each council or activity group.

Mini-Lecture:

Yes.

Visuals:

Yes. These may be reproduced as overhead transparencies or transferred to flip chart pages

Handouts:

- Mission statement activity directions
- School characteristics activity directions
- *Mission Statement*
- *High Expectations*
- *Strong Instructional Leadership*
- *Emphasis on Teaching and Learning*
- *Safe and Orderly Environment*
- *Monitoring of Student Progress*
- *Parent and Community Involvement*

Suggested Activities:

In addition to developing a school mission and identifying important indicators of effective schools, councils can begin planning the process for assessing how well their schools exhibit the characteristics of effective schools.

Preparation Required:

- Become familiar with the points made in the mini-lecture. Rehearse them, using your own words. Use the visuals as your outline and memory-jogger.
- Become familiar with the activities for the session. If your district has already engaged in some effective schools activities, modify the activities as appropriate.
- Prepare some suggestions for follow-up activities, such as adapting the indicators identified by teams during this session for a survey of the school community.
- Reproduce handouts.

Suggested Approach:

- Introduce the topic and the planned activities.
- Present the mini-lecture on effective schools. Make it interactive by asking participants for examples that illustrate the characteristics. Depending on their responses, some of the detail included in the mini-lecture can be omitted.
- Distribute the handouts on effective schools characteristics.
- Stimulate a discussion on the characteristics. Ask the group if their schools are doing a particularly good job in one or more of the areas and to describe the results.
- Relate the characteristics to one another, e.g., a strong instructional leader will monitor student progress, high expectations for performance influence time on task, parent involvement affects school climate.
- Divide the group by council teams. Assign the first activity (*Mission Statement*). Hand out the activity description.
- Monitor team progress. Urge them to complete the activity on time.
- After 30 minutes, bring the total group together to discuss the approaches they have developed. Did the teams come to the same conclusions or are differences in the process appropriate to variations in the school communities?
- Divide the group into six subgroups, not by school council.
- Assign each group one of the following topics:
    - high expectations for student and staff performance
    - strong instructional leadership
    - emphasis on teaching and learning
    - safe and orderly learning environment
    - monitoring of student progress
    - parent and community involvement
- Distribute the directions for the second activity (*School Characteristics*).
- Monitor the progress of subgroups.
- After 45 minutes, bring the total group together. Ask each subgroup to present its indicators; lead a discussion about them.

Mini-Lecture: Effective School Improvement

The research on effective schools tells us, beyond any real doubt, that schools really can make a difference. Students who come from minority cultures and whose families live in poverty can learn just as well as more advantaged children—if the schools they attend are properly organized, well led, and expect students to learn.

There has always been debate about how much responsibility schools should assume. For years, educational research said that family background, not educational opportunity, determines success in life. But if that is true, how have so many Americans risen from humble beginnings to become success stories? Do we really think that dedicated teachers and good schools cannot set students on a course for success in school and life?

One way to address this question is to ask, as researcher Ron Edmonds did, whether some schools have been successful in teaching all kinds of children, regardless of who their parents are or where they live. The answer, of course, is YES. And many of them are in inner city areas so depressed that they look incapable of supporting any kind of nurturing or satisfying life style.

As Edmonds and his colleague, Larry Lezotte, discovered, these schools have several important characteristics in common: strong leadership, a sense of mission, an orderly climate, high expectations for student achievement, an emphasis on the basic skills, frequent monitoring of student progress, and strong parent and community support. And these schools tend to develop in districts that allow them a significant amount of autonomy.

Autonomy is the connection between school based improvement and the effective schools research. For a school to develop the characteristics necessary to be effective in teaching all children, the school community has to be able to make the changes necessary to improve. As John Chubb of the Brookings Institute put it:*

Show Visual #1

> The more control a school has over those aspects of its organization that affect its performance—the articulation of its goals, the selection and management of its personnel, the specification of its policies—the more likely a school is to exhibit the qualities that have been found to promote effectiveness.

Chubb's study of high- versus low-performing high schools found that improvement efforts based on higher level intervention and imposed mandates will backfire because the more schools are deprived of autonomy, the more their performance suffers.

There is one important caveat. An effective school is defined as one where virtually all children are performing at least on grade level. While schools meeting that definition tend to have certain characteristics, those characteristics do not necessarily add

*Chubb, John E. The Dilemma of Public School Improvement. Unpublished paper prepared for presentation in the Spoor dialogues on Leadership Program, Dartmouth College, May 4, 1987.

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up to an effective school. Ultimately, a school must be judged on student performance alone. With that in mind, let's look more closely at the characteristics associated with effective schools:

I. A clearly written mission statement that describes what the school wants to accomplish in the education of all children.

Schools have three possible missions: sorting and selecting, custodial care, and teaching for learning. In stating what their mission is, few schools would admit that they exist to provide babysitting or to weed out the less competent. Any school that wants to be effective will frame its mission in terms of teaching and learning for all children.

Some examples:

> The mission of Woodland School is to ensure that all students realize their full potential.
>
> All students leaving Lawrence School will be equipped to pursue personal and societal goals productively in a changing environment.

In addition to having developed a written statement of purpose, in collaboration with its community, an effective school will also have set objectives for meeting its mission:

Show Visual #2

- Core of knowledge to be mastered by all.
- Objectives for each grade level.
- Appropriate instructional materials.
- Progress measured.
- Communication about school progress.

The objectives will include such things as:

- An identified core of knowledge that all students are expected to master.
- An identified set of skills and learning objectives for each grade level.
- Instructional materials that cover the learning objectives.
- Accurate means of measuring progress toward the objectives.
- Regular communication with parents, students, and staff about the school's progress in achieving its mission.

II. High expectations for both student and staff performance.

If everyone in the school community understands that all children can learn, and that all staff are capable of teaching them, children will learn and teachers teach. Certainly, if we expect mediocre performance, that is what we will get. To quote from Ron Edmonds, "There has never been a time in the life of the American public school when we have not known all we needed to in order to teach all those whom we choose to teach."

Two signs of high expectations are: 1) students are not tracked into homogeneous ability groups with few opportunities for advancement; and 2) children from low-income or minority families are not held to lower standards than students from middle-class backgrounds.

Show Visuals #3 and #4

- Teachers believe all students can learn.
- Teachers complement teachers/students.
- Classes grouped heterogeneously.
- Children not rigidly grouped.
- Variety of approaches used

- New approaches tried if skills not mastered.
- Students rewarded for efforts/performance.
- Equal access to opportunities.
- Parents notified of success.
- Student leadership opportunities.

Some high expectations practices of effective schools include:

- Teachers express the belief that all students can master the basic skills and the core curriculum.
- Teachers speak well of each other and their students.
- Classes are composed of students with varied skills and backgrounds.
- Instructional groups are formed and reformed frequently, so that children are not rigidly grouped by ability levels.
- A variety of approaches, including ones where children of different abilities are grouped together, are used to help slower learners.
- New learning approaches are tried if skills are not mastered.
- Students are given rewards, praise, and recognition for their efforts as well as performance.
- Students have equal access to instructional opportunities, regardless of their achievement levels.
- Parents are notified often of their children's success.
- Students are given opportunities to be leaders and accept responsibility.

III. Strong instructional leadership.

Although this quality can also come from the teaching staff, the most important educational leader in a school is its principal. A leader is a person who sees a need, assumes responsibility for meeting it, and takes action by organizing what needs to be done and inspiring others to help.

Strong leaders are visible and accessible, take an active role in observing and supervising teachers, are responsible to faculty, parents, and students, and can articulate a clear and positive philosophy of education. It is also the principal who sets the stage for frequent discussion of school improvement.

Show Visual #5

- Initiates discussions re. student achievement.
- Reviews lesson plans.
- Ensures curriculum alignment.
- Provides staff development.
- Involves all affected by decisions.
- Communicates vision.
- Visits classrooms/observes teachers.

An effective instructional leader:

- Initiates frequent discussion about student achievement.
- Reviews lesson plans with teachers and is available to discuss instructional strategy.
- Makes sure that the school's core curriculum matches state and district requirements, the standardized testing program, and the school's instructional materials.
- Provides staff development opportunities that meet instructional needs.
- Involves all the people who will be affected before making a decision.
- Has a strong, positive vision of the school and communicates it well to all audiences.
- Regularly visits classrooms and observes teachers.

IV. Emphasis on mastery of basic skills and student time on task.

In effective schools, students are given ample opportunity to learn. Time is used efficiently, with learning time carefully protected against interruption. Teachers spend most of the class time in active instruction, teaching content and checking for understanding before students practice on their own. In all subjects, teachers emphasize the skills of reading, writing, computing, and spelling.

The curriculum should also ensure the opportunity to develop higher order skills. The mastery of basic skills is stressed not as an end in itself, but because these skills are essential to developing independent thinking and analysis.

Show Visual #6

- Principal protects learning time.
- Students expected to achieve 80% minimum.
- Basic subject requirements for all.
- Regularly assigned/checked homework.
- Active and direct instruction.
- Consistent standards for promotion.
- Skill mastery required.

Some further examples of an emphasis on teaching and learning are:

- The principal protects learning time against non-academic interruptions.
- Students are expected to achieve a success ratio of 80% or above on most of their work, especially independent work and homework.
- The curriculum includes requirements for all students in all the basic subjects.
- Appropriate homework is regularly assigned and promptly checked.
- Teachers spend substantial class time in active and direct instruction.
- Standards for promotion are consistent and well understood by teachers, students and parents.
- Students master the skills of one level before they are allowed to move on to the next level.

V. A safe and orderly learning environment.

In an effective school, the climate is orderly, purposeful, and free from any fear of harm. Not only is there a basic guarantee of physical and emotional safety, but there is also a school-wide approach to discipline where the rules are well-known and obeyed by staff and students alike. This means that while students are responsible for orderly behavior in halls and classrooms, for example, teachers are responsible for staying on schedule, custodians for keeping the bathrooms clean, and the principal for monitoring all school activities.

Show Visual #7.

- Discipline code consistently enforced.
- All informed re. code.
- Recognition for positive behavior.
- Building clean/well maintained.
- Teachers model behavior/academic commitment.
- Teachers prepared/prompt.
- All treated with respect.
- Parents quickly notified re. problems.

Characteristics of an orderly environment are:

- A school-wide discipline code describes expectations for student and staff conduct and is consistently enforced.
- Parents, teachers, and students are well informed about the code.
- Students are given regular and frequent recognition for positive behavior.
- The school building is clean and well maintained.
- Teachers are good models of behavior and academic commitment.
- Teachers are well prepared for class, and start and end classes promptly.
- Students and teachers treat each other with respect.
- Parents are notified quickly if their children develop problems.

VI. Continuous monitoring of student progress.

In effective schools, student progress is assessed frequently, and teachers use the information to improve the instructional program. The principal also makes sure that the curriculum objectives match what teachers are teaching and the tests used to measure achievement.

Show Visual #8

- Annual norm-referenced, standardized tests.
- Variety of techniques used to measure progress.
- Tests aligned with curriculum.
- Prompt feedback to students.
- Instruction modified based on student performance.
- Principal monitors student progress.
- Parents kept informed.
- Test results reported to community.

Monitoring is effective when:

- A plan is in effect for regularly checking student achievement, individually and by class, and it includes norm-referenced, standardized tests.
- Teachers use a variety of techniques to measure student progress, such as homework, criterion-referenced tests, question and answer sessions and class discussions.
- The tests used are well matched to the curriculum.
- Teachers give students prompt feedback on classwork and test results.
- Teachers evaluate and modify the instructional program based on how students are performing.
- The principal frequently monitors test results and other indicators of student progress.
- Parents are aware of the system for monitoring progress and are given frequent information about how their children are doing.
- Student test results are fully reported to the entire school community, in a way that allows comparison with other schools.

VII. Parent and community involvement.

The research is very clear: when parents are involved, students do better in school and they go to better schools. When the wider community is involved, schools enjoy better reputations and stronger financial support.

Show Visual #9

- Parents understand role in school goals
- Organized parent group supported by school.
- Structured participation in school decisions.
- School policies openly discussed with parents.
- Multiple communication modes used.
- School/classrooms open to parents.
- Complete information re. child's progress provided.

Good home-school relations are fostered when:

- Parents have a clear understanding of the school's goals and their role in helping to meet them.
- There is an organized parent group that the school fully supports by providing a meeting room, information about the instructional program, and access to telephone and copying machines.
- Parents and the community participate in structured ways in developing school goals and making decisions about the school.
- School policies about such thing as discipline, homework, promotion, testing, and ability grouping are openly discussed with parents.
- The school communicates with parents in several different ways, such as home visits, newsletters, phone calls, notes, and parent-teacher conferences.
- The school and classrooms are open to visits by parents.
- Parents are given complete information about their child's progress, including test results and whether the child is performing at grade level.
- The school establishes a parent center with comfortable chairs, reading materials, and an activities bulletin board.

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Activity: Mission Statement

How should your school go about developing its mission statement? Select a recorder and plan a process, taking the following questions into consideration.

1. Who should manage the process?
2. Which elements of the school community should be involved?
3. Should they participate in sub-groups or all together?
4. How should representatives of the different groups be selected?
5. What methods should be used to communicate with the different elements?
6. How can the ideas of the different groups be put together to create one statement?
7. How should the final results be ratified?

You have 30 minutes to complete this assignment.

Activity: School Characteristics

What characteristics should our schools have? The directions for this activity are:

1. Select a recorder.

2. Decide whether the group will focus on elementary, middle, or high schools.

3. Using the handout related to your assigned topic as a guide, each person should spend five minutes quietly imagining a school of the chosen grade level that has completely developed this characteristic.

4. Have each person briefly describe what they imagined, with the recorder writing down the main ideas.

5. From these ideas, develop a set of ten indicators your group thinks are most important.

You have 45 minutes to complete this assignment.

Handout: Mission Statement

Objectives to support a clearly written mission statement should include:

- An identified core of knowledge that all students are expected to master.
- An identified set of skills and learning objectives for each grade level.
- Instructional materials that cover the learning objectives.
- An accurate means of measuring progress toward the objectives.
- Regular communication with parents, students, and staff about the school's progress in achieving its mission.

Handout: High Expectations

Some high expectations practices of effective schools include:

- Teachers express the belief that all students can master the basic skills and the core curriculum.
- Teachers speak well of each other and their students.
- Classes are composed of students with varied skills and backgrounds.
- Instructional groups are formed and reformed frequently, so that children are not rigidly grouped by ability levels.
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- Students at all achievement levels have equal access to instructional opportunities.
- Parents are notified often of their children's success.
- Students are given opportunities to be leaders and accept responsibility.

Handout: Instructional Leadership

An effective instructional leader:

- Initiates frequent discussion about student achievement.
- Reviews lesson plans with teachers and is available to discuss instructional strategy.
- Makes sure that the school's core curriculum matches state and district requirements, the standardized testing program, and the school's instructional materials.
- Provides staff development opportunities that meet instructional needs.
- Involves all the people who will be affected before making a decision.
- Has a strong, positive vision of the school and communicates it well to all audiences.
- Regularly visits classrooms and observes teachers.

Handout: Emphasis on Teaching and Learning

Examples of an emphasis on teaching and learning are:

- The principal protects learning time against non-academic interruptions.
- Students are expected to achieve a success ratio of 80% or above on most of their work, especially independent work and homework.
- The curriculum includes requirements for all students in all the basic subjects.
- Homework is regularly assigned and promptly checked.
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Handout: Safe and Orderly Environment

Characteristics of a safe and orderly environment are:

- A school-wide discipline code describes expectations for student and staff conduct and is consistently enforced.
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- Teachers are good models of behavior and academic commitment.
- Teachers are well prepared for class, and start and end classes promptly.
- Students and teachers treat each other with respect.
- Parents are notified quickly if their children develop problems.

Handout: Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress

Monitoring of student progress is effective when:

- A plan is in effect for regularly checking student achievement, individually and by class, and it includes norm-referenced, standardized tests.
- Teachers use a variety of techniques to measure student progress, such as homework, criterion-referenced tests, question and answer session and class discussions.
- The tests used are well matched to the curriculum.
- Teachers give students prompt feedback on classwork and test results.
- Teachers evaluate and modify the instructional program based on how students are performing.
- The principal frequently monitors test results and other indicators of student progress.
- Parents are aware of the system for monitoring progress and are given frequent information about how their children are doing.
- Student test results are fully reported to the entire school community, in a way that allows comparison with other schools.

Handout: Parent and Community Involvement

Good home-school relations are fostered when:

- Parents have a clear understanding of the school's goals and their role in helping to meet them.
- There is an organized parent group that the school fully supports by providing a meeting room, information about the instructional program, and access to telephone and copying machines.
- Parents and the community participate in structured ways in developing school goals and making decisions about the school.
- School policies about such thing as discipline, homework, promotion, testing, and ability grouping are openly discussed with parents.
- The school communicates with parents in several different ways, such as home visits, newsletters, phone calls, notes, and parent-teacher conferences.
- The school and classrooms are open to visits by parents.
- Parents are given complete information about their child's progress, including test results and whether the child is performing at grade level.
- The school establishes a parent center with comfortable chairs, reading materials, and an activities bulletin board.

Visual #1

The more control a school has over those aspects of its organization that affect its performance—the articulation of its goals, the selection and management of its personnel, the specification of its policies—the more likely a school is to exhibit the qualities that have been found to promote effectiveness.

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Handout: Making Effective Presentations

Most people get "butterflies" when they are asked to make a presentation. While it may not be possible to completely eliminate that nervous feeling, it is possible to bring it under control. The most important thing to do is **be prepared.**

• Think about your audience. What do they want/need to know about your topic? Providing them with the necessary information—and nothing more—is your objective.

• Remember: Your goal is to gain your audience's support for the school, the council, and/or the council's recommendations. In order to "sell" your proposal, you will first have to "sell" yourself. Let your own personality show. Smile; let people know you enjoy being with them.

• Prepare an outline of your presentation containing the key points you want to make and supporting information for each.

• If possible, prepare a visual for each of your key points. Overhead transparencies and slides are good, but a flip chart is also effective. (Markers and newsprint are probably available in the school or art supply closets.) Simple, one-page handouts work also, and people can take them home. If you can convey the message in a picture rather than words, so much the better. Choose a medium that is best suited for the size of your audience and the room in which you will be making the presentation. Slides work best in large rooms where lights can be dimmed; overheads are good for medium to large audiences and spaces; and flip charts and handouts work best with smaller groups.

• If you think you might forget a key point, transfer your outline to a series of 3 x 5 cards with one point on each card. Do not write out your presentation unless you have been asked to do so as a handout. If you write it out, you will be tempted to read it to your audience. If you read it, you will lose eye contact with those listening to you. Eye contact is important if you want to convince someone of the validity and importance of what you are saying. As you make your presentation, look from one person to another and, while you are looking at them, talk directly to them. A side benefit of looking directly at people is that it makes you feel less nervous to talk to one person at a time.

• But the single most important thing you can do to ensure an effective presentation (and less nervousness) is rehearse, rehearse, rehearse. Make your speech to your spouse, your kids, your dog, and even to your mirror. A well-rehearsed speech is one that has been given so often that you no longer need your cue cards.

Visual #1

- **Involving Others**
- **Classroom resources lists**
- **Activity sponsors**
- **Adopt-a-School program**
- **Joint activities with school groups**

Visual #2

Task Forces

- Needs Assessment
- Discipline
- Safety
- Attendance
- Human Relations
- Problem Prevention

Visual #3

Committees

- Finance and Budget
- Curriculum
- Communications
- Legislative

#Visual 4

Getting Information to the School Community

- "Key Communicator" program
- Annual school directory
- Newsletter
- Presentations
- Council minutes
- Student newspaper
- Suggestion/question box
- Council booth

Visual #5

Listening to the Community

- List of "publics"
- Neighborhood coffees
- Key communicators
- Open forum
- Telephone interviews

Module # 6: Conducting a Needs Assessment

Overview/Goals:

On completion of this module, participants should understand where a needs assessment fits in the planning cycle, know the types of information to gather, and be able to organize their councils to conduct an assessment of their school's strengths and weaknesses. The session includes a presentation on how to conduct a needs assessment and one or more preliminary needs assessment activities.

Time Required:

One and a half to two hours.

Room Set-Up:

Lecture and break-out spaces.

Equipment Required:

Overhead projector and screen and/or flip chart easel and pad.

Mini-Lecture:

Yes.

Visuals:

Yes. These may be prepared as overhead transparencies or transferred to flip chart pages.

Handouts:

- *The Planning Cycle*
- *Indicators of Educational Equity and Quality*
- *Tests*
- *Conducting Opinion Polls*
- *School Profile*

Visuals may also be reproduced as handouts.

Suggested Activities:

Depending on the time available during this session, councils can:

- develop a plan and time schedule for conducting a needs assessment;
- determine the areas of inquiry for a needs assessment;
- identify the types of information required to conduct a needs assessment of those areas; and/or
- develop a plan and time schedule for conducting one or more opinion polls.

Completing the needs assessment and preparing a school profile should be a post-session assignment. Progress should be reviewed at subsequent sessions.

Preparation Required:

- Become familiar with the mini-lecture and handout contents.
- Prepare visuals and handouts.
- Select the activities to be used.

Suggested Approach:

- Introduce the topic and the activities for the session.
- Make the presentation. Allow for discussion/questions during the presentation and/or afterward.
- Distribute copies of *Indicators of Educational Quality and Equity* and *Conducting Opinion Polls*. Suggest that they be read before councils begin their activities.
- Divide groups by councils. Give them their assignments. Allow sufficient time for their completion.
- Bring full group together. Have each council report on what it completed during the activity session.
- Assign completion of a needs assessment and development of a school profile.

Mini-Lecture: Conducting a Needs Assessment

Conducting a Needs Assessment

Show Visual #1

Needs Assessment
What is – What should be
Strengths – Needs

A needs assessment is a process of comparing the current situation in the school (what is) with the desired conditions (what should be). The needs assessment should identify strengths as well as needs. The outcome is a report or a list of the primary strengths and the primary needs of a school.

Show Visual #2

(The Planning Cycle)

A needs assessment is the first step in the planning cycle. But planning is an ongoing process, not an event. This diagram shows the planning cycle sequence. The needs assessment helps identify issues to be addressed. These issues are then arranged in priority order because some will be more important than others. The priority issues or problems are analyzed, strategies for solving them are identified, plans for implementing the strategies are laid and then implemented. The final step in the cycle is the beginning of the next– an evaluation of the success of the effort and the identification of further needs.

Types of Information Used

Show Visuals #3 and #4

Information Required
- Student performance
- Student participation
- Staff and community opinions re. programs
- Staff and community opinions re. student performance
- Student opinions

- Concerns of parents/community groups
- Reports on special programs
- Reports by accrediting agencies
- Data re. community composition
- Previous improvement plans

Several general types of information are used in needs assessments to determine areas of strength and areas of need:

- Student performance data including results of standardized tests, grade averages, grade retention or subject failure rates, etc. for the last three years. This information should be broken down by gender, socio-economic class and ethnicity of the students.
- Student participation data including attendance rates, participation in special courses or programs, participation in extra-curricular activities, and dropout rates. Where possible, this information should also be broken down by gender, socio-economic class, and ethnicity of the students. And, where possible, data should be made available by grade, school, district, and state to allow comparisons with other schools.
- Staff and community opinions about the school's program offerings, standards, or climate. This information should be broken down by ethnicity of the respondent.
- Staff and community opinions about student performance including homework, attitudes, motivation, and discipline, and their input on how well the school is developing the characteristics of effective schools.
- Student opinions about relationships with staff, teacher expectations, school climate, discipline, relationships with peers, etc.
- Concerns raised by parents or community groups.
- Reports on special programs, e.g., for the handicapped, bilingual students, remedial students, etc., prepared for the state or federal government.
- Reports by accrediting agencies.
- Information about the composition of the community including educational levels, ethnicities, socio-economic levels, family patterns, and occupational stability and about the resources in the community such as libraries, educational institutions, and active civic groups.
- Any previous school improvement plans.

Basic Tasks in a Needs Assessment

Show Visuals #5 and #6

Basic Tasks

- Determine areas to be reviewed.
- Identify types of information wanted.
- Assemble available information.
- Plan surveys of staff, students, and parents.
- Select/develop, administer surveys.

- Compile and organize the data.
- Interpret the data.
- Compare data to standards.
- Look at changes over time.
- List school's strengths and needs.

1. Determine the areas of information to be reviewed based upon the characteristics of effective schools and the goals for the school and district.

2. Identify specific types of information that will help identify strengths and weaknesses. Develop a plan to review the school's programs and services in terms of the school's goals and the characteristics of effective schools.

3. Assemble available information. Consider statistics generated by the district, reports prepared for the state or federal government, surveys that are less than two years old, etc.

4. Decide how surveys of staff, students, and parents will be conducted. If samples are to be used, determine how they will be selected in order to provide the clearest and most valid information.

5. Select or develop survey instruments and administer them.

6. Compile the data in an organized manner. Show attendance and dropout data as percentages by grade level, race and sex for three years. Report accreditation data in terms of classifications (all clear, advised, warned, probation, dropped, etc.) or by detailing specific deficiencies. Divide state-required test results into socio-economic levels, quartiles, or other appropriate break-downs by specific subgroups. Prepare frequency distributions (the numbers of responses that fell into each category) of survey responses.

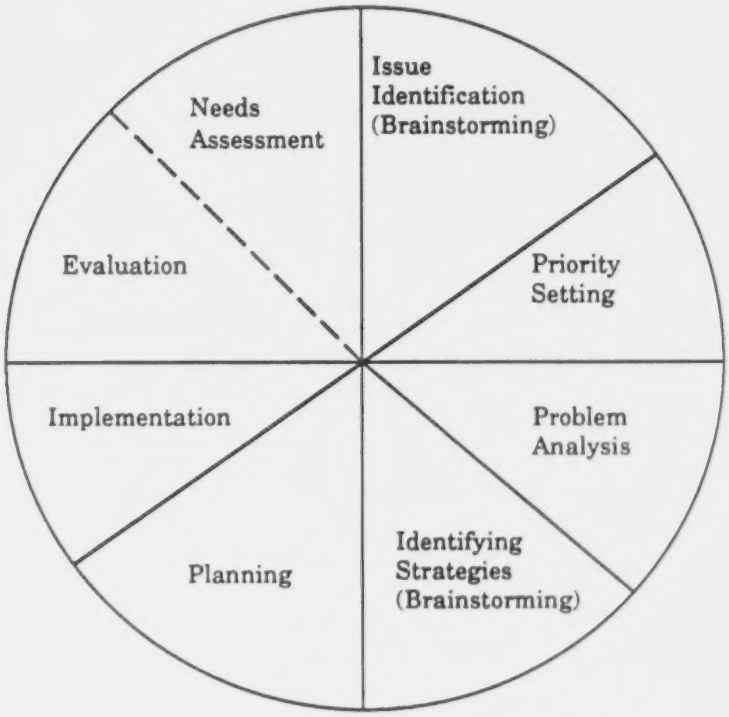
7. Interpret the data. Study each data source individually and carefully. Note relationships among the sources. For instance, if 10th grade test scores and attendance are low and the dropout rate is high, an investigation should be made to determine whether these indicators are related.

8. Compare the data to various standards. Look at national, district, and state results wherever possible. Note where the school falls short of other districts and where it exceeds their scores. Seek further information to explain variations.

9. Look at changes in data over time. Note where improvement is being made and where it is not. Seek information to explain the changes.

10. Make one list of the school's strengths and another of the areas where the school needs further improvement. Focus especially on the characteristics of effective schools.

Handout: The Planning Cycle



Planning is an ongoing process, not an event. The diagram above shows the planning cycle sequence. It begins with a needs assessment, which helps identify issues to be addressed. These issues are then arranged in priority order because some will be more important than others. The priority issues or problems are analyzed, strategies for solving them are identified, plans for implementing the strategies are laid and then implemented. The final step in the cycle is the beginning of the next—an evaluation of the success of the effort and the identification of further needs.

Handout: Indicators of Educational Equity and Quality

In an effective school, *all* students are learning at levels considered acceptable for middle class children. In other words, student performance cannot be predicted by race, gender, or family income, and few students are falling more than two or three months below grade level. To assess how well a school is doing, this general description needs to be translated into indicators.

What is an Indicator?

An educational indicator is a statistic that tells us something about a school or a school system. Just as a blood pressure check provides information to your doctor about your health, an educational indicator helps measure the "health" of the schools. Good indicators suggest whether progress is being made and warn of likely problems.

What is a Good Indicator?

The indicators of educational quality that school improvement councils use to assess their schools should meet the following criteria:

- They should provide meaningful information. That is, give you information about characteristics of the school that are important to student achievement.
- They should measure elements common to the entire school, so comparisons can be made.
- They should measure elements that continue from year to year, so comparisons can be made over time.
- They should provide information that can be understood by everyone.
- School or district staff should be able to collect the information without undue effort or cost.
- They should be generally accepted as valid and reliable statistics.

What are Some Commonly Accepted Indicators of Quality?

Following are some kinds of statistics that are often used by schools to assess how well they are doing their jobs:

- student test scores;
- student attendance;
- teacher attendance;
- amount of time students spend on a subject;
- number of suspensions or other disciplinary actions;
- number of students receiving remedial help;
- student/teacher ratios;
- teacher turnover;
- incidences of vandalism;
- number of curriculum choices available;

- percentages of students involved in extracurricular activities;
- numbers of students moving into and out of the school;
- numbers of students entering and exiting bilingual programs;
- results of staff, parent, and student surveys;
- ratings of accreditation agencies;
- percentage of graduates going to college;
- employment rates after high school; and
- number of dropouts.

Determining Equity

Educational equity is determined by collecting and comparing data according to student subgroups within the school. This is called disaggregating the data. Students may be grouped according to race, sex, socio-economic background and/or ethnicity. When there are little or no differences in the rates of learning among subgroups, a school can consider itself educationally equitable. For instance, one indicator a council is certain to look at is test scores. In addition to looking at those scores grade by grade, comparisons can be made between girls and boys within grade levels and between socio-economic groupings of students. Comparisons among ethnic and racial groups are also possible. Consistent differences in scores warrant further investigation and action.

Wherever possible, the statistics used as indicators should reflect the various groups within the school. Disaggregating the data in this way will help pinpoint problems that may be hidden in the larger statistics. Be aware, however, that educational *equity* is not the same as educational *quality*. A school where all subgroups of students are learning at similar rates may be educationally equitable, but if those rates are low, it is not providing educational quality.

What are Some Commonly Accepted Indicators of Equity?

Equity is a comparative matter. For each of the above indicators of quality, we must ask whether there are disparities of access and opportunity among different groups of students. Do all types of students participate nearly equally in extracurricular activities? Does student attendance vary substantially by race or family income? Is one group of students more likely to be subject to disciplinary action than others?

Other questions to ask are:

- Are the gifted and talented or advanced placement programs representative of all groups in the student population?
- Is the percentage of students scoring in the top quartile about the same across all sub-groups? In the bottom quartile?
- Do patterns of grading differ according to social class, ethnicity, or gender? If there are disparities, do they correspond with those found when standardized test scores are disaggregated?
- Are girls performing as well as boys in science and math—subjects that are traditionally male domains? Are boys doing as well as girls in language arts and social studies?
- Are students with special needs, such as limited English proficiency, receiving a level of services adequate to ensure entry into the mainstream?

Handout: Tests

Test results are one type of indicator that councils will want to use in conducting their needs assessments. It is critical, then, that council members understand the different types of tests used in schools and how to interpret the results from each.

Types of Tests/How Each Are Used

Teacher Made: These are quizzes and tests that teachers design themselves or are found in textbooks. Teachers use the results to judge how well students are learning what is being presented in the classroom and whether they are ready to move on to the next unit or level of a subject. Students are often graded on these tests, but the results will rarely be used by councils for needs assessment purposes since the test is only given to one class.

Criterion Referenced: These are tests designed to show the skills and knowledge students have acquired in a subject area. They give specific information about what an individual student has or has not learned. Scores are reported in terms of how well students did in comparison to a performance standard. These tests differ from teacher made tests in that they cover the full range of skills and knowledge students have gained throughout their schooling and not just that which is being presented in the classroom at a given time. They are also often "standardized" in the sense that many students across the country take the same test.

Teachers can use the results of criterion referenced tests to plan individual learning programs for students and to determine how well those programs are working. Councils can use the results to make judgments about how groups of students compare with one another by looking at the percentages that met or exceeded the standards. The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) is a widely-used example of a criterion referenced test.

Minimum Competency: These specialized, criterion referenced tests are designed to determine whether a student has gained the skills and knowledge that have been judged necessary to meet the minimum demands of adult life. Many states have instituted minimum competency tests as a requirement for graduation.

Norm Referenced: Unlike criterion referenced tests, where student achievement is compared to a performance standard, norm referenced tests compare individual students to a norm group—a group of students of the same age or grade who also took the test. Norms are usually based on national samples. These standardized tests are used to judge how well students in a given class, grade, school or school district are doing in relation to other students. Certain norm-referenced tests are also widely used, such as the California Achievement Test (CAT) and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS).

How Results Are Presented

Raw scores – the number of correct items or the percent of items correctly answered. It is difficult to make judgments using raw scores, since there is nothing to compare them against.

Percentile rank – the test results compared to the performance of a specific group of students who were in the same grade and took the test at the same time of year. A score of 60 means the student knew more of what was expected than 59% of the norm group, but knew less than 39% of the same group.

Quartiles – the range of percentile points divided evenly into four quarters, based on national samples. Twenty five percent of student scores fall into each of the quarters.

Grade equivalent – performance in terms of grade in school. A score of 5.3 means the student performed as well as a typical student in the third month of the fifth grade would be expected to do.

Standard scores – a method of presenting raw scores that makes them easier to compare with one another and against an average score.

Stanine – a method of presenting standard scores in nine equal units. The highest score is nine and the lowest is one. The average score is five. It eliminates small differences between scores and prevents making judgments based on limited differences.

Using Results to Get Information About Your School

Test scores can indicate a school's strengths and provide some clues to areas for improvement. For instance, if all students are consistently scoring below national norms in some subjects and not others, the curriculum in those areas should be looked at. Perhaps the topics covered in the test are not being taught. If certain groups of students—children from disadvantaged families, for instance—are consistently scoring lower than other students, then reasons for that should be explored.

The school improvement council will not have access to the scores of individual students: They are confidential. These scores wouldn't be of use in any case. In fact, councils will probably not concern themselves with individual classes either, but will want to consider grade levels, specific subgroups of students and overall achievement in subject areas in establishing their school profiles.

Percentile ranks are probably the most easily understood comparison. School scores can be compared with those of other schools in the district, in the state, regionally, and nationally. Percentile ranks are useful in making comparisons between different groups of students on the same subtest or in making comparisons for the same group of students across various subtests. This information can be used to assess program strengths and weaknesses.

Quartiles are useful in making comparisons between the school's and national scores. Nationally, twenty five percent (25%) of the scores fall into each of the four quarters. Therefore, if the school has 35% of its scores falling into the lowest quarter, it indicates that more students are scoring less well than their peers across the county. Similarly, if the school has 15 percent of its scores falling into the lowest quartile, the school's performance is above the national norm.

Grade equivalent scores are useful in making comparisons between different groups of students on the same subtest. For instance, the median grade equivalent in reading vocabulary for boys in a certain grade can be compared to the median grade equivalent for girls in the same grade. Be careful, however, not to compare grade equivalents

between different subtests—reading vocabulary to reading comprehension, for example. Caution should also be used in interpreting individual grade equivalent scores. A score well above the grade level of the student taking the test does not mean he or she is capable of mastering work at that higher grade. It does mean that the student scored much better than the typical student in his or her current grade.

Following are some questions councils need to ask about test scores in their school:

- How does this year's performance compare to last year's? The year before that? Have there been any changes? Why? Are the students different? Has the curriculum been changed?
- How do your school's results compare with district and state norms?
- What percentage of your students scored at the very bottom or at the very top of the standardized tests given in your school? When the data are disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, or family income level, do the percentages at the top and bottom change significantly from group to group?
- What percentage of your high school students took the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)? How many (%) fell into each of the following ranges of scores for math and for verbal: 200-299, 300-399, 400-499, 500-599, 600-699, and 700-799. How does this compare with previous years? (If another college entrance exam is commonly taken in your community, analyze those results similarly.)
- How many of your high school students took each of the Advanced Placement (AP) exams? How many scored three or better? Over the years, have more students been taking the exams? Have their scores been getting better? Why/why not?
- Are there any differences in scores among groups of students in your school, such as students of different races, from different ethnic groups, or socioeconomic backgrounds?
- Do these tests measure what is being taught in your school? If not, why is your school's curriculum different from that of other schools?
- If your school tracks students by levels of achievement, does this practice contribute to disparities in test scores? Grouping students by achievement may result in differing standards and perpetuating poor performance.

Handout: Conducting Opinion Polls

Opinion polls are a good way to collect information about the strengths and needs of a school. Following are some suggestions for gathering this information in an organized fashion.*

Selecting a Sample

Councils will most likely want the opinions of teachers and other school staff, students, parents, and the general public. Polling all school staff is fairly simple because their numbers are not overly large. But students, parents, and public are another story. For these, a council will probably want to sample only a percentage. That percentage, however, must be proportionate to the entire group in order to gain a good cross-section of opinions. For instance, if the student body in a school looked like this:

500 White students
300 Black students
200 Hispanic students
600 girls
400 boys
100 from low income families (as measured by eligibility for free or reduced price lunches)

and a council decided to poll 10% of its students, the numbers included in the poll would be:

50 Whites
30 Blacks
20 Hispanics

Of these, 60 would be girls, 40 would be boys and 10 would come from low income families.

It may be somewhat more difficult to get an accurate picture of the numbers within subgroups when sampling an entire community, but care should be taken to include all important segments.

Types of Opinion Polls

There are both formal and informal ways to gather opinions. Keeping track of issues raised at PTA or board of education meetings or in letters to the editor of the local newspaper are examples of informal methods. It is difficult to keep systematic records of this kind of data, however.

Questionnaires and interviews are two of the better known formal methods to gather opinions. Both can be done systematically, which means the information is more reliable. The simplest and least time consuming is a written questionnaire. But there are some drawbacks to using a questionnaire. One is that questions can be

*Adapted from: Cone, John C. *Conducting Opinion Polls.* School Advisory Council Assistance Project, University of South Carolina, 1979.

misunderstood, so the answer you get may not be to the question you intended to ask. Another is the cost of mailing them (questionnaires sent home with students can result in a number of "lost" forms). Also, the return rate is likely to be low (30% is considered good) and you may have no idea whether those who responded are typical of all the people who received the questionnaire.

Interviews, either by telephone or in person, eliminate the drawbacks of written questionnaires, but they produce other problems. The telephone interview is easier because it allows the interviewer to reach more people in a shorter period and it can be done most any time. It does, however, exclude those without telephones and those with unlisted telephone numbers, and talking on the phone may be difficult for those who have a limited command of standard English.

Person-to-person interviews are the most difficult to conduct. They take more time, more people, more planning and more training. Yet the results from these surveys are probably the most reliable, if the sample is well-selected.

There are numerous ways to get an interview sample. You can go to the third house on every other block, for instance, or select the tenth person to come through the grocery store door, the parents of one student in every class or homeroom, or every hundredth name on the tax rolls. Or you can systematically identify a group that represents the subgroup populations you want input from.

Group interviews are another type of face-to-face interview. The advantage is obvious—it takes less time to interview a group of people than it would to interview each individually. In addition, a discussion can trigger thoughts in individuals that they might have forgotten to mention if they were alone with the interviewer. However, discussion can also have the opposite effect. Some people may be reluctant to voice an opinion that they think the rest of the group might not support.

Councils must weigh the pros and cons of each polling method before determining how they want to proceed.

Writing Questionnaires and Interviews

All questionnaires and interviews have three parts: an introduction, content questions, and demographic questions.

The introduction should state what the survey is about, for whom it is being conducted, why it is being conducted and how the answers will be used. This should be as clear and succinct as possible. If it is a written questionnaire, directions should be included on what to do with the form once it has been completed.

Questions must be phrased neutrally. That is, they must not hint at a desired answer. Do not, for instance, ask: *What do you think of the school's failure to adequately teach math?* Or even, *Do you believe the school's math program is a failure?* Instead, use a question like: *What, if any, concerns do you have about the school's math program?*

The sequence of questions can also influence answers. The question, *How many hours would you estimate your son/daughter spends watching TV on school nights?* is likely to trigger a particular answer if followed immediately by, *What do you think is the major cause of falling reading scores among today's youth?* By placing the questions in this order, people are cued to blame television and their responses are not reliable.

Demographic questions ask the respondent such things as age, sex, race, religion, education level, income level, occupation, etc. This information permits a better understanding of the overall data. It will allow, for instance, a comparison of opinions about the school by ethnic group, which could help pinpoint equity issues. Asking teachers to identify themselves by grade level or department might aid in determining the cause of program differences.

Testing the Survey

An extensive field test of a questionnaire or interview is not necessary, but trying it out a few times before administering it will help insure the questions are clear. Some questions can be taken in more than one way. Suppose the question is, *What's your opinion of the school's lunch program?* The respondent might say, "Do you mean the food or the supervision in the lunch room?" If both are meant, the question should be divided into two. If it is one or the other, the question should be rewritten to state more clearly what is wanted.

A trial test will also tell you if the survey is too long, offensive in any way, or too vague to give you the kinds of answers you are looking for.

Tabulating Responses

Tabulating survey results can be simple or difficult, depending on the type of questions used and must be taken into consideration when questions are developed. Open-ended questions—those that allow for many different responses—can be difficult to tabulate, while simple yes/no answers are easy to count. A question such as, *What do you think ought to be done to improve discipline in our school?* is likely to elicit dozens of different answers. In order to make judgments about the opinions expressed, these responses will have to be categorized in some way and the numbers falling into each category will have to be counted. This can be a complicated and time-consuming process.

Either/or and multiple choice questions, however, require only a simple tabulation of the number of responses falling into each of the preselected categories. Instead of the open-ended question on discipline, the following might be used:

Which of the following practices would improve discipline in our school.

(a) Notifying parents when infractions take place.

(b) Establishing a peer "court."

(c) Hiring a disciplinarian.

(d) Establishing an in-school suspension policy.

The trade-off for ease of tabulation is a loss of information. Respondents might well come up with good suggestions or ideas that hadn't been thought of by the council, but have no way to express them in a multiple choice format.

The degree of difficulty in tabulating responses will also be affected by the number of different data breakdowns that will be required. If the information will be disaggregated by race, income group, sex, or other demographic category, then individual answers will have to be sorted into those groups. This can be fairly laborious if done by hand. Fortunately, many schools have personal computers that can be used to help.

Tips

The following are some things to keep in mind when preparing and using opinion surveys:

- Set up a time-line for writing, testing, and tabulating the results of the survey. Assign responsibilities for the various steps.
- Publicize the poll in advance so that respondents will be looking for it.
- Prepare a report on the findings, including a description of how the poll was conducted, who sponsored it, how the sample was picked, and what the questions were.
- Make sure the results of the poll are shared with those who participated in it.
- Publicize any resulting programs or projects with the community so they know the poll was useful.
- Don't make the survey too long. It may be better to conduct a short poll on one or two aspects of the effective schools characteristics each year than to do a massive one every three years.

Handout: School Profile

School Name: _____
Address: _____
_____
_____
Telephone: _____

Section I: School Characteristics

1. How large is the student population at your school? List enrollment number in each grade.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. What is the ethnic composition of the student body in your school?

_____% White _____% Black _____% Hispanic
_____% Asian _____% American Indian

3. Indicate the number of staff in each of the following positions:

	Full-time	Part-time
Administrators	_____	_____
Classroom or academic subject teachers	_____	_____
Special area teachers	_____	_____
Teacher aides	_____	_____
Counselors	_____	_____
Library and other media professionals	_____	_____
Social workers	_____	_____
Security officers	_____	_____
Food service personnel	_____	_____
Clerical	_____	_____

4. What is the ethnic composition of the staff in your school?

_____% White _____% Black _____% Hispanic
_____% Asian _____% American Indian

5. Have any of these numbers changed significantly in the last three years? _____
_____

6. What is the range of class size in regular classes? _____

In remedial classes? _____

Section II: School Organization

1. What are the instructional goals of your school? How were they established? How are they related to the curriculum?

2. How are these school goals communicated to the staff? _____

Students? _____

Parents? _____

Community Members? _____

3. Does your school have regular procedures for internal review of the curriculum, textbooks, and instruction? If so, describe them and indicate when the most recent reviews were completed. _____

4. How many books and journals exist in your school library and what is the breadth of offerings? _____

5. How is the curriculum articulated between elementary and secondary schools? ____

6. What programs/activities exist to prepare students for making the transition from the elementary to the secondary school setting? _____

7. For each of the program categories listed below, indicate whether your school has a program in existence and discuss its strengths and its areas in need of improvement.

Science Program _____

Social Studies Program _____

Foreign Language Program _____

Math Program _____

Bilingual or Multicultural Education _____

Special Education _____

Gifted and Talented Program _____

Basic Skills Program– Math _____

Basic Skills Program– Reading _____

Basic Skills Program—Writing

Physical Education Program

Arts Program

Student Government

Tutorial Program _____

Computer Literacy Program _____

Opportunities for student participation in community-based programs _____

Other extra-curricular activities _____

8. Are students tracked by achievement levels? Are students with different levels of achievement grouped together from classes? Does the school have a policy on ability grouping? _____

9. How long is your school day? How much of it is used for lunch, recess, and other non-instructional activities? How much is devoted to the basic skills? _____

10. How are teachers organized for planning and instruction, e.g., by grade levels, subject matter, cross-grade teams, etc.? How much planning time is allocated? _____

11. Does your school have a formal promotion policy? What are the criteria used? How are classroom standards set? _____

12. Does your school have a formal policy on homework? If so, summarize it. Is it strictly enforced? How? _____

13. During the past school year, how many of each of the following occurred in your school?

Student suspensions _____
Assaults on students _____
Assaults on teachers _____
Reported incidents of vandalism _____

Have these rates been consistent over the past three years? If not, what changes have occurred? Why? _____

14. Does your school have a formal discipline policy and/or any special procedures or programs to maintain discipline? If so, describe them and indicate the number of students served by the programs. _____

15. On the average, what percentage of the students attend school each day? _____% Teachers? _____% Have either of these rates changed significantly during the last three years? If so, explain why. _____

16. Describe the relationships with the community served by your school. Do parents have specific opportunities for participation? Other community groups? In what areas? Has the participation been successful? How? _____

17. Does your school have any ongoing staff development activities? If so, describe them and discuss how they are planned. (Do not include district level or other activities not specifically developed for your school.) _____

Section III: Outcomes

1. Aside from regular evaluations of student performance in classes, does your school have formal procedures for measuring student achievement? If so, describe them and specify results from the last three evaluation periods. _____

2. List any awards or honors students have received that you consider to be particularly good indicators of the quality of your school. _____

3. List any awards to your school or any of its programs in the last three years. _____

Visual #1

Needs Assessment

What is — What should be

Strengths — Needs

145

Visual #2

(Create a visual from the Planning Cycle handout)

Visual #3

Information Required

- Student opinions
- Concerns of parents/ community groups
- Reports on special programs
- Reports by accrediting agencies.
- Data re. community composition
- Previous improvement plans

Visual #4

Information Required

- Student performance
- Student participation
- Staff and community opinions re. programs
- Staff and community opinions re. student performance

Visual #5

Basic Tasks

- Determine areas to be reviewed.
- Identify types of information wanted.
- Assemble available information.
- Plan surveys of staff, students, and parents.
- Select/develop, administer surveys.

Visual #6

Basic Tasks

- Compile and organize the data.
- Interpret the data.
- Compare data to standards.
- Look at changes over time.
- List school's strengths and needs.

Module #7: Setting Priorities

Overview/Goals:

The purpose of this section is for councils to know how to use a systematic method to establish priorities for action. The session consists of a step-by-step description of how to use the priority setting worksheet and an opportunity for councils to begin developing priorities for the current planning cycle.

Time Required:

One and a half to two hours.

Room Set-Up:

Total group lecture and small group breakout spaces.

Equipment Required:

Overhead projector and screen or flip chart pad and stand.

Mini-Lecture:

Yes. However, this is a demonstration rather than a presentation.

Visuals:

Yes. These may be reproduced as overhead transparencies or transferred to flip chart pages.

Handouts:

Priority Worksheet

Suggested Activities:

If time allows, councils can begin establishing their priorities for the first round of the planning cycle.

Preparation Required:

Become familiar with the worksheet; make copies for distribution.

Suggested Approach:

- Introduce the session by reviewing the status of school needs assessments. Refer to the *Planning Cycle* handout (distributed during the Needs Assessment module) to show where priority setting fits.
- Distribute copies of the *Priority Worksheet.*
- Using the visuals and the examples that are on them, take the group, step-by-step, through the priority setting method.
- Divide the group by councils and have them begin to establish their own priorities based on the results of their needs assessments. Assign completion of the activity for post-session work.

Mini-Lecture: Setting Priorities

A number of issues will be identified during a needs assessment. But, since not everything can be tackled at once, the issues will have to be put into priority order. The answers to two questions will help determine which issues should come before others. They are:

- How serious is the situation, problem or issue?
- How urgent is it?

Show Visual #1

- How serious?
- How urgent?

You have been given a worksheet that can be used to help set priorities. I am going to review the instructions for using it.

Step 1

List the issues identified through your needs assessment in the first column. For example: *(Note to trainer: visuals illustrate the process.)*

Show Visual #2

Issues

1) Reading program.
2) Lunch room discipline.
3) Bus safety.

Step 2

For each issue, write down the evidence of its seriousness in the second column.

Show Visual #3

Seriousness

1) Test scores declining. School is in danger of falling below state standards.
2) Very noisy. Some food throwing.
3) Narrow, winding Gallmeyer Road is hazardous for pick-up and drop-off of students.

Step 3

For each issue, write down the evidence of its urgency in the third column.

Show Visual #4

Urgency

1) At current rate of decline, school will be below state standard in two years.
2) A group of parents voiced complaints at the last PTO meeting.
3) Proposed housing development, which will add to traffic on Gallmeyer Road, to be completed within three years.

Step 4

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being high, rate the seriousness and urgency of each issue. Multiply the two numbers to get an overall rating for each issue.

Show Visual #5

Serious/Urgent

1) 10/10 (10 x 10 = 100)
2) 6/5 (6 x 5= 30)
3) 10/8 (10 x 8 = 80)

Step 5

Using the rating as a guide, assign a priority to each issue. Note: There may be reasons other than seriousness and urgency for assigning particular priorities. An issue that the board of education has asked all councils to address, for instance, would receive a high priority even though the issue may not be particularly serious or urgent in the school. Also, councils should take on some issues that are short-term and relatively easily solved as well as those that require long-term solutions. Success is important to group morale and to the way the school community perceives the council. In our example, the council decided the lunchroom issue was a good short-term priority so, even though its serious/urgent rating was lower, the council decided to tackle it before the longer term issue of bus safety.

Show Visual #6

Priority

1) #1
2) #2
3) #3

Handout: Priority Worksheet

Issues	Seriousness	Urgency	Serious/ Urgent	Priority

Visual #1

- How serious?
- How urgent?

Visual #2

Step 1

Issues

1) Reading program.

2) Lunch room discipline.

3) Bus safety.

Visual #3

Step 2

Seriousness

1) Test scores declining. School is in danger of falling below state standards.

2) Very noisy. Some food throwing.

3) Narrow, winding Gallmeyer Road is hazardous for pick-up and drop-off of students.

Visual #4

Step 3

Urgency

1) At current rate of decline, school will be below state standard in two years.

2) A group of parents voiced complaints at the last PTO meeting.

3) Proposed housing development, which will add to traffic on Gallmeyer Road, to be completed within three years.

Visual #5

Step 4

Serious/Urgent

1) 10/10 (10 x 10 = 100)

2) 6/5 (6 x 5= 30)

3) 10/8 (10 x 8 = 80)

Visual #6

Step 5

Priority

1) #1
2) #2
3) #3

Module #8: Problem Analysis/Strategy Identification/Force Field Analysis

Overview/Goals:

The goal of this session is for council members to be able to use a systematic method to analyse the issues they have identified as school priorities and to use their analyses to determine solution strategies. The session consists of two mini-lectures plus demonstrations of the methods described in them.

Time Required:

One to one and a half hours plus time for councils to work on analyzing their priority issues and determine solution strategies (may be a post-session activity).

Room Set-Up:

Lecture style plus break-out spaces.

Equipment Required:

Flip chart easel, pad and markers, overhead projector and screen (optional).

Mini-Lecture:

Yes. There are two—a brief explanation of a problem identification/strategy selection method and an explanation of how to conduct a force field analysis.

Visuals:

Yes. These may be made into overhead transparencies or transferred to flip chart pages. In addition, the handout, *Force Field Worksheet*, should be either made into an overhead transparency or transferred to a flip chart page.

Handouts:

- *Force Field Worksheet*

Visuals may also be used as handouts or the mini-lectures can be reproduced and given out.

Suggested Activities:

If there is time, councils can begin analyzing their priority issues. This may also be assigned as post-session work.

Preparation Required:

Prepare visuals and handouts. Review the mini-lecture and be prepared to demonstrate the problem analysis/strategy identification, and force field analysis methods.

Suggested Approach:

- Introduce the session and its activities by reviewing the planning cycle.
- Present the mini-lecture on problem solving/strategy identification.
- Ask for a council to volunteer to work on one of its issues as a demonstration of the technique. Work through the process.
- Distribute copies of the *Force Field Worksheet.*
- Describe how to conduct a force field analysis using the points and illustrations in the mini-lecture.
- Using the same issue as before, lead a demonstration of a force field analysis using a strategy identified earlier in the session.
- If there is time, divide the group by councils and have them begin working on the analysis of their priority issues.
- Assign the completion of the activity as post-session work.

Mini-Lecture: Problem Analysis/Strategy Identification

The resolutions to some council priorities will be clear. That is because the problems are clear. Other issues, however, will require additional analysis before strategies can be developed. Unsatisfactory test scores are an example. You have to know *why* scores are unsatisfactory before a solution can be sought.

Show Visual #1

You have a problem when:

- something is other than it should be.
- you do not know why.
- you want to know why.

You have a problem when you have something that is other than it should be, when you do not know why, and when you want to know why. The key concepts in problem analysis are:

Show Visual #2

Key Concepts

Should – the way things are expected to be.

Actual – the way things are.

Should: the ways things are expected to be or to function based on standards or performance in effective schools. Shoulds are best stated in concrete, specific and measurable terms. They are not just hopes or desires.

Actual: the way things are actually going. The actual may be below, equal to, or above the should. If it is significantly below, you have a problem.

You analyze problems by isolating what makes one problem different from other problems. How is it unique? What is it? What is it not? The key is describing it precisely so that causes can be clearly identified and specific actions fitted to the problem.

The process consists of answering the following questions:

Show Visual #3

Process

What is the problem behavior?
Where does the problem occur?
When does the problem occur?
To what extent does it happen?
Has anything **changed** over time?

What: What is the problem behavior? What is happening that should not be happening? What should be happening that is not?

Examples: Are students failing to do homework? Are students disruptive in the lunchroom?

Where: Where does the problem occur? Are there patterns? Where does it not occur where it might?

Examples: If reading scores are too low, is there one group or class that is doing better? Or if discipline is an issue, is it in or outside of the classroom where misbehavior occurs?

When: When does the problem occur? Does it often occur before some event? When does the problem not occur, but might?

Examples: Is discipline a problem in classrooms after lunch? Are students absent on Fridays before long weekends?

To What Extent: How big a problem is this? Can you measure it? Are there trends or patterns? How serious is it?

Example: If student attendance is a problem, how does it compare to other schools in the district?

Changes: Has anything about the problem changed over time?

Examples: Has discipline improved in recent years? Is attendance declining?

Once you have clearly described the issue or problem, you will then be able to identify possible solution strategies. The steps are:

Show Visual #4

Identifying Strategies

1) Brainstorm a list of possible strategies.
2) Decide which hold the most potential for success.
3) Determine whether strategies are feasible.

Step 1

Brainstorm a list of possible strategies for addressing an issue.

Step 2

Decide which strategies hold the most potential for success. This can be done simply by having each person select the three they think have the highest potential, then counting the number who voted for each item. Since some strategies can be implemented in tandem with others, more than one can be selected for further review.

The third step, a method to determine whether solution strategies are feasible or not, will be introduced later in this session.

Mini-Lecture: Force Field Analysis

Once a council decides what it is it wants to accomplish, it needs to look at the forces that may prevent it from succeeding and those that may help it accomplish its objectives. A force field analysis can be used to help the group determine whether its goals are realistic and the actions it can take to minimize negative forces and encourage positive ones.

Show Visual #5

Strategy: Develop a new K-8 reading program.

Step 1:

Enter the council's strategy at the top of the worksheet. State it clearly and concisely. Be specific. For example, a strategy might be to develop a new K-8 reading program.

Show Visual #6

Positive Forces	Negative Forces
• Teachers are behind it. • Reading specialist available. • Council members willing to serve on development committee.	• Tight budget year: Board may not have funds for new texts & materials. • Will take a lot of staff time.

Step 2:

Brainstorm positive and negative forces. Ask: What could keep us from accomplishing this? Is there anything within the council that could get in the way? In the school? In the district? In the community? What might help us achieve this goal? What skills and talents lie within the council that will support this action? Who and what within the school/district/community will help us on our way?

Enter positive and negative forces in the appropriate columns on the worksheet. Be specific– indicate who, what, where, when. List forces that work both for and against your goal in both columns. Indicate how they do each.

Show Visual #7

Positive Forces	Negative Forces
• Teachers are behind it.	• Tight budget year: Board may not have funds for new texts & materials.
• Reading specialist available.	• Will take a lot of staff time.
• Council members willing to serve on development committee.	

Step 3:

Identify the forces, both positive and negative, that could have the greatest impact on achieving the goal. Which are the most likely to happen? These are your key variables. Circle them on the worksheet.

Show Visuals #8 and #9

Actions: *Teachers are behind it.*

- Help teachers conduct a "reading is fun" campaign.
- Get parent volunteers to assist in recording numbers of books students read and maintaining bulletin boards. (Joan to form committee.)
- Urge the PTA to back the campaign and the curriculum revision process. (Harold to approach PTA Executive Committee.)

Actions: *Tight budget year.*

- Seek adopt-a-school partner to help fund purchase of materials. (John to get estimate of dollars needed and sound-out the superintendent and board of education. Rose to bring issue before district Adopt-A-School coordinator.)

Step 4:

For each of your positive key variables, identify actions the council can take to maximize the likelihood of its happening and to strengthen it when it does occur. Be specific—list who will take action, when, and the resources that will be needed. For each of your negative key variables, identify actions the council can take to minimize, neutralize, overcome or reverse it. Again, be specific. If you can't establish an action to deal with a force, note that on the worksheet as well.

Show Visual #10

Is the strategy feasible?

Only if assured of board support or external source of funds.
Need to check with board of education before proceeding.

Step 5:

Decide whether this council strategy is feasible.

Handout: Force Field Worksheet

Strategy:

Positive Forces	Negative Forces

Actions:

Is the strategy feasible?

Visual #1

You have a problem when:

- something is other than it should be;
- you do not know why;
- you want to know why.

Visual #2

Key Concepts

Should — the way things are expected to be.

Actual — the way things are.

Visual #3

Process

What is the problem behavior?

Where does the problem occur?

When does the problem occur?

To what extent does it happen?

Has anything **changed** over time?

Visual #4

Identifying Strategies

1) Brainstorm a list of possible strategies.

2) Decide which hold the most potential for success.

3) Determine whether strategies are feasible.

Visual #5

Strategy: Develop a new K-8 reading program.

Visual #6

Positive Forces	Negative Forces
• Teachers behind it. • Reading specialist available. • Council members willing to serve on development committee.	• Tight budget year: Board may not have funds for new texts & materials. • Will take a lot of staff time.

Visual #7

Positive Forces	Negative Forces
• Teachers behind it.	• Tight budget year: Board may not have funds for new texts & materials.
• Reading specialist available.	• Will take a lot of staff time.
• Council members willing to serve on development committee.	

Visual #8

Actions: *Teachers are behind it.*

- Help teachers conduct a "reading is fun" campaign.
- Get parent volunteers to assist in recording numbers of books students read and maintaining bulletin boards. (Joan to form committee.)
- Urge the PTA to back the campaign and the curriculum revision process. (Harold to approach PTA Executive Committee.)

Visual #9

Actions: *Tight budget year.*

Seek adopt-a-school partner to help fund purchase of materials. (John to get estimate of dollars needed and sound-out the superintendent and board of education. Rose to bring issue before district Adopt-A-School coordinator.)

Visual #10

Is the strategy feasible?

Only if assured of board support or external source of funds. Need to check with board of education before proceeding.

Module #9: Action Planning/Identifying Potential Problems/Evaluation

Overview/Goals:

As a result of this session, council members should be able to follow a systematic planning method, including the identification of potential implementation problems, and to monitor and evaluate council progress toward achieving its plans. The session consists of two demonstrations of how to use worksheets to plan and to analyze the plan's potential implementation problems. If time permits, councils may also begin to develop action plans.

Time Required:

One hour to explain the use of the worksheets plus time for councils to develop plans and analyze potential problems.

Room Set-Up:

Lecture style, break-out spaces and large-group discussion.

Equipment Required:

Overhead projector and screen or flip chart easel and pad.

Mini-Lecture:

Yes. These are sets of instructions for using the planning and potential problems worksheets.

Visuals:

Yes. In addition to those included, both worksheets should be reproduced as overhead transparencies or transferred to flip chart pages.

Handouts:

- *Planning Worksheet* and directions
- *Potential Problems Worksheet* and directions
- *Criteria for Reviewing Plans*
- *Evaluation Survey*

Suggested Activities:

If time permits, councils could develop a plan to achieve one of their goals and analyze it for potential implementation problems. Completion of their plans and potential problem analyses should be the post-session assignment.

Preparation Required:

- Prepare handouts.
- Review mini-lectures and become thoroughly familiar with how to use both work-

sheets. Think through possible examples to illustrate how each worksheet is used if councils have not reached the point where an actual issue can be addressed.

Suggested Approach:

- Introduce the session and the topic of planning.
- Distribute copies of the planning worksheet and the directions for its use. Present the information in the mini-lecture, *Action Planning*. As you go through the directions for using the planning worksheet, use an example drawn from the group to illustrate the steps.
- Distribute copies of the potential problems worksheet and its directions. Present the information in the mini-lecture, *Potential Problems*. Using the earlier example, have the group generate potential problems, causes and preventive actions to illustrate the steps.
- Distribute copies of *Criteria for Reviewing Plans*. Give the group a few moments to review it.
- Divide the group by councils. Charge them with developing a plan and an analysis of that plan's potential implementation problems. Circulate among subgroups while they work, giving counsel as necessary. At the end of the time period, bring entire group together for a review of their accomplishments.
- Distribute copies of the *Evaluation Survey*. Suggest that councils use this form or something similar at the end of each year to gauge their progress toward school improvement.
- Assign completion of plans for post-session work.

Mini-Lecture: Action Planning

After priorities have been established and it has been determined that a particular strategy or series of strategies is feasible, a detailed plan must be developed. Planning exactly how a solution will be implemented is a critical council responsibility. The entire council should be involved for several reasons:

Show Visual #1

- All need to be aware.
- Need "detail" people.
- All are responsibile.
- Planning may reveal flaws.

• Implementation usually requires a series of detailed steps. Council members should all be aware of what steps are to be taken, why, and by whom.

• Councils are usually composed of idea people and detail people. This is definitely the time for the detail people to contribute their talents.

• It is easy for people in groups to assume someone else is taking the necessary steps to put group decisions into effect. Complete implementation planning requires all parties to take responsibility for clarifying exactly who is to accomplish the needed action.

• Planning may reveal flaws in solutions that require modification or consideration of alternatives by the council.

One way to systematically plan is to use the worksheet that has been distributed to you. Let's go through each of the steps in developing an action plan using one of the goals you have set. Who would like to volunteer a goal?

Show Visual #2

(Planning Worksheet)

Step 1:

What is the goal or purpose of the plan? Be as specific as possible. What are the beginning date and the target date for completion?

Step 2:

What assumptions is the council making in developing the plan– things it believes to be true, but does not have full information on?

Step 3:

What tasks or action steps will be taken to achieve the goal? Must some be taken in sequence? What order?

Step 4:

What are the beginning and completion dates for each action?

Step 5:

Who will be responsible for seeing that the action is completed?

Step 6:

Whose support is required or who must be informed about the action?

Step 7:

What resources (money, personnel, time) will be required to complete the plan?

Step 8:

What outcomes are expected?

Step 9:

How can the activity be documented in order to evaluate its effectiveness?

Mini-Lecture: Potential Problems/Monitoring and Evaluation

After the council's plans are made, it is time to look for gremlins—things that can make your plan go awry—and to identify steps that can be taken to avoid them. You won't have time to deal with everything that might go wrong, so you need a way to identify those that are likely to be critical to the accomplishment of your goal. The worksheet you have been given will help you with this process. Using our same example, let's go through the steps for using it.

Show Visual #3

(Potential Problems Worksheet)

Step 1:

Brainstorm a list of things that could go wrong with your plan. Be specific. How will your plan be affected if this happens?

Step 2:

To determine the seriousness of each problem, if it does occur, we will rate it on a scale of 1—will not seriously disrupt the plan—to 10—will severely hinder the plan. (Have individuals individually rate the items then tally the results.)

Step 3:

On a scale of 1 (low probability) to 10 (high probability) which of the most serious problems are most likely to occur? (Again, have group individually rate the problems, then tally the results.)

Step 4:

What are the likely causes of the highest risk problems?

Step 5:

What actions can the council take to prevent each likely cause from occurring and, thus, avoid the problem?

Step 6:

Who will be responsible for the preventive actions? Make the necessary assignments?

Once you have identified potential problems and laid plans for avoiding or minimizing them, you have done as much as is possible to ensure the success of the council's plan. Now it is time to implement it. But the planning cycle is not yet complete. One more activity remains—monitoring and evaluation.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Councils are responsible for the successful implementation of their action plans. The goal for any plan is to complete all tasks on schedule, within budget, and with the expected outcomes. Of course, this does not always happen and adjustments will be necessary as the plan is implemented.

The council should review progress monthly. Reports on implementation should be prepared by appropriate council members or school staff. Delays and other problems should be discussed and resolved if possible.

Strong monitoring will help the implementation of the plan. Remember that adjustments are normal and that not all ideas will work out as originally conceived. The function of monitoring should be to identify and correct problems rather than to find fault or blame people for failures.

Finally, keep records of progress, of discussions of problems, and modifications to the school plan. These will be needed for any school improvement reports you may desire or be required to prepare.

Handout: Planning Worksheet Directions

Step 1

State the goal or purpose of the plan. Be as specific as possible. Include a beginning date and a target date for completion.

Step 2

List the assumptions the council is making in developing the plan—the things it believes to be true, but does not have full information on.

Step 3

List the tasks or action steps that will be taken to achieve the goal. If some must be taken in sequence, list them in order.

Step 4

Establish beginning and completion dates for each action.

Step 5

List the individual or individuals who will be responsible for seeing that the action is completed.

Step 6

List those whose support is required or who must be informed about an action.

Step 7

Identify the resources (money, personnel, time) that will be required to complete the plan.

Step 8

Identify the outcomes expected.

Step 9

Identify various means of documenting the activity and/or evaluating its effectiveness.

Handout: Planning Worksheet

Objective:

Assumptions:

Actions:	Timelines	Responsibilities	Resources	Expected Outcomes	Documentation

Handout: Potential Problems Worksheet Directions

Step 1

Brainstorm a list of things that could go wrong with your plan. Be specific—state how your plan will be affected if this happens. Enter them in the "Potential Problems" column.

Step 2

Determine the seriousness of each problem, if it does occur, on a scale of 1 (will not seriously disrupt the plan) to 10 (will severely hinder the plan). The group may want to have individuals do their own rating first, then tally the results. Enter the results in the "Seriousness" column. Select the most serious potential problems.

Step 3

Determine the likelihood each of the most serious problems will occur on a scale of 1 (low probability) to 10 (high probability). Again, it may be easier to have group members individually rate the problems, then tally the results. Enter the results in the "Probability" column. Select the highest risk problems.

Step 4

Determine the likely causes of the *highest risk* problems. Keep digging until you find causes that you can do something about. Enter them in the "Causes" column.

Step 5

Determine the actions the council will take to prevent each likely cause from occurring and, thus, avoiding the problem. Enter these in the "Preventive Actions" column.

Step 6

Decide who will be responsible for the preventive actions and make the necessary assignments.

Handout: Potential Problems Worksheet

Potential Problems	Seriousness	Probability	Causes	Preventive Actions	Responsibility

Handout: Criteria for Reviewing Plans

Councils can use the ten questions below to review draft plans prior to submitting them to district administration and/or board of education.

1. Is the need being met important to staff and students?
2. Is the plan of action workable?
3. Are important tasks omitted?
4. Are the resources required– time, staff, equipment, funds– available?
5. Are the outcomes clear?
6. Are the appropriate people responsible for actions?
7. Are the timelines reasonable and do they allow some margin for error?
8. Does the plan build on the strengths of the schools?
9. Are all parties committed to the plan?
10. Does the plan include both short and long range goals?

Handout: Evaluation Survey

Please help the School Improvement Council assess its effectiveness by answering the following questions:

1. What school group do you belong to?
   Parents____
   Students____
   Classroom teachers____

2. Is the planning team representative of the various groups noted above?
Yes____ No____

3. Have you been adequately informed of the activities and decisions of the Council?
Yes____ No____

4. Have you had adequate input into the decisions of the Council? Yes____
No____

5. Has a comprehensive plan been prepared at this school? Yes____ No____

6. If yes, has the plan been shared with you? Yes____ No____

7. If yes, does the plan effectively address the needs of the school? Yes____ No____

8. How successful would you rate the following school activities? (List those undertaken by the Council and others of interest.)

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't Know

Visual #1

- All need to be aware.
- Need "detail" people.
- All are responsible.
- Planning may reveal flaws.

Visual #2

Create a visual from the Planning Worksheet *handout.*

Visual #3

Create a visual from the Potential Problems Worksheet.

END

U.S. Dept. of Education

Office of Education
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ERIC

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